Towards Extended Purposive Conversations:
An Exploration of Interactions between Three Educators and Young Children in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in Urban Areas Designated As Disadvantaged

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate in Education (EdD) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

In Ireland there is an unprecedented policy focus on education and care for children in the years before compulsory schooling. This policy focus is warranted. Studies have demonstrated that for young children, particularly those living with the injustice of poverty, high quality education and care leads to measurable gains in thinking and social skills. These gains are primarily determined by the quality of educator-child interactions. However, due to a dearth of research on these interactions in Ireland, there is little knowledge of the actual pedagogical practices to support children's learning being implemented in early education and care settings. There is, therefore, a lack of insight into how learning and development opportunities might be maximised in those contexts.

Drawing from socio-cultural theory, contextualised within educational inequality, the study is qualitative in nature, informed by an interpretive paradigm and employs a case study research strategy. The focus of this thesis is on scheduled small group learning experiences, with a particular emphasis on the interactions between three educators and three to four year old children in three selected early childhood education and care settings, in urban areas designated as disadvantaged. Research in Ireland has highlighted the link between educational inequality, variation in language use and success in primary school. Early childhood settings, in areas of disadvantage, have a significant role in providing the kinds of language experiences that will support children to engage with and make the kinds of meanings that are expected at school. These kinds of language experiences can be acquired through extended purposive conversations between educators and children.

The findings suggest that the educators established warm reciprocal relationships with the children and engaged in interactions that could be seen as enhancing social and emotional development. However, they may need to emphasise interaction strategies such as open-ended questioning to engage young children in extended purposive conversations. The fuel for such conversations could be in enriching, cognitively challenging and meaningful scheduled small group learning experiences. The findings have implications for the implementation of the *Free Pre-School Year,* implementation of the *Workforce Development Plan* and the content of early childhood education and care training programmes.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACP	Association of Childcare Professionals
ADM	Area Development Management
AISTEAR	The Early Childhood National Curriculum Framework
BCCN	Border Counties Childcare Network
CCC	City or County Childcare Committee
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CORI	Conference of Religious of Ireland
CRA	Children's Rights Alliance
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion
DES	Department of Education and Science
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EPC	Extended purposive conversations
ECICS	Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FÁS	Forais Áiseanna Saothair, The Irish Training and Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HSE	Health Services Executive
ICPN	Irish Childcare Policy Network

ISCI	An International Society for Child Indicators
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCIP	National Childcare Investment Programme
NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association
NCO	National Children's Office
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECP	The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
OMCYA	Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Pobal	Previously known as Area Development Management
QNHS	Quarterly National Household Survey
Síolta	The Early Childhood National Quality Framework
SGLEs	Small group learning experiences
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This is a critical moment in the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ireland. There is an unprecedented policy focus on education for children generally in the years before compulsory schooling, and in particular children of three and four years of age. There is a sound research basis for this focus. Studies demonstrate that for young children, particularly those living with the injustice of poverty and social exclusion, high quality education and care can lead to better school achievement, higher cognitive test scores, less special education placements and higher school retention rates (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 2003; Schweinhart et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004a). This chapter begins by explicating some international research on effective pedagogy in ECEC, in particular for children living in areas of socio-economic inequality. The situation in relation to Irish ECEC policy and research is then presented in order to contextualise this study of educator-child interactions. The research question and the aims of the study are portrayed. The terminology is then explained, the author's background and pre-suppositions elucidated and the structure and content of this document outlined.

International Policy, Research and Practice in ECEC

An ambitious anti-poverty early intervention programme called Sure Start was established in the United Kingdom, opening its first centre in 1999. It concentrated on early education and care in areas of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. It was established as a result of the findings of a *Comprehensive Spending Review* (1998) commissioned by the Labour government. In this review the impact of high quality

ECEC was found in all social groups but was most significant in children living with poverty. Parallel to that, three distinct but significant research projects relating to effective early education were funded by the UK Department for Education and Skills (DfES). With their focus on the identification of the components of effective pedagogy for children aged three and four years, they serve as a useful foundation for this study.

The first research project, *Effective Provision for Pre-school Education* (EPPE), was a longitudinal study which began in 1997. It aimed to investigate the types of early childhood education and care provision which were most effective in promoting children's progress and development (Sylva et al., 2003). A key question for the EPPE project was whether "preschool experiences could reduce social inequalities" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004a, p.7). The resulting evidence was based on 141 randomly selected early childhood centres, providing ECEC for a total of 2,800 three and four year old children in six local authorities in England and in excess of 300 children cared for in homes. The study demonstrated that early childhood education does make a significant difference for all children in terms of attainment (in early literacy and maths) for those cohorts in centre-based education. The greatest gains were found for children who were identified as disadvantaged based on a range of one or more indicators, including: English was not their first language; they lived in a family of three or more children; they had a low birth weight; their mother had no educational qualifications; one parent was unemployed; and they grew up in a single parent household (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004a).

The EPPE study also suggested that families who are disadvantaged can provide a supportive learning environment with good learning outcomes for their children. The EPPE project found that it was what the parents did (for example playing with children,

reading stories) that significantly influenced children's learning outcomes, and not their socio-economic status based on the indicators of disadvantage above. Likewise, in the settings it was what educators did (providing early literacy and mathematical experiences, meeting individual needs, and especially interacting meaningfully with children) that made the significant differences to children's outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004a).

The findings from the EPPE study formed the basis of a second comprehensive, rigorous research project *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* ([REPEY] Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002). The researchers employed the children's outcome data from the EPPE study in relation to academic, social and dispositional learning to determine effective settings. Intensive case studies were then conducted in 12 of the most effective settings and two recommended reception classes. As a result the most effective pedagogical strategies to support the attainment, progress and development of children between the ages of three to five years were identified (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The key findings of the REPEY project relevant to this research were that the pedagogy in the most effective settings was characterised by:

- an equal emphasis on social and cognitive development, where both are seen as complementary;
- staff knowledge and understanding of child development and learning, and providing appropriate cognitive challenge;
- strategic planning for a wide range of curriculum experiences; and
- the quality of adult-child verbal interactions through 'sustained shared thinking', open-ended questioning and extension of children's thoughts (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

The third significant research project, financed by the DfES in the UK, was the *Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning* ([SPEEL], Moyles, Adams & Musgrave, 2002a). SPEEL relied on the professional judgement of selected educators in

27 ECEC settings to identify the components of effective pedagogy which were embedded within the practices and thinking of those adults. Based on their analysis, Moyles et al. identified 129 key statements which they explicitly refer to as core competencies in an effective educator's role and which comprise their *Framework for Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years.* These statements are categorised under the following three key areas: principles, practice and a professional dimension. The professional dimension is described as the skills and attributes, which are brought to, but also which are developed within the role of educator (Moyles et al.).

High quality education and care is ensured by a number of factors, one of which is the quality of the educators. High quality educators are responsive and sensitive to the individual children's needs, and stimulate the cognitive development of the children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The structural environment is also significant. High quality structural environments contain high staff-child ratios, small group size, ongoing and professional training (Siraj-Blatchford et al.). The physical learning environment contributes to quality early education when it is aesthetically pleasing with a rich variety of materials which stimulate curiosity and exploration, carefully arranged and stored for accessibility in interest/learning areas (Hohmann, Weikart & Epstein, 2008; Schweinhart et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al.).

Furthermore, it is considered that "the single most important determinant of high quality ECEC is the interaction between children and staff" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2006, p, 6). A comprehensive study conducted in the United States was designed to identify the factors that make the greatest difference to three and four year old children's outcomes (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010). The purpose of the study was to

make recommendations to policy makers on where to best direct resources. Consistent with UNESCO and Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002), the data revealed that goals for early education may only be achievable if programmes ensure high-quality teacher-child interactions[1] (Burchinal et al., 2010).

Well-designed early education programmes are shown to engender benefits for the participants themselves, government and society (Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). These benefits are reported to outweigh the costs (Heckman, 2006). "A number of longitudinal studies have shown rates of return from $4 to $17 for every dollar invested" over the life cycle (National Economic & Social Council [NESC], 2009, p. 24). The rates of return to the same investment made in a person of a given ability at different ages are demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

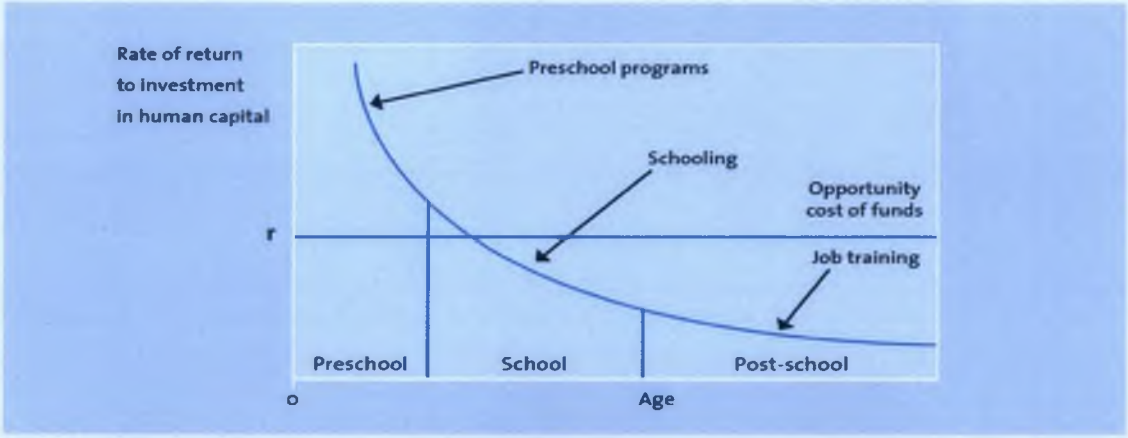

Figure 1 Rates of return over the life cycle

Source: Cunha, Heckman, Lochmer and Masterov (2005) cited in NESC (2009, p.24)

The case has been made in Ireland for "targeting expenditure where returns are greatest" (National Competitiveness Council [NCC], 2009, p. 20). The situation in Ireland, with respect to ECEC, is now explored.

[1] In the REPEY study 'pedagogical' interactions are the precise cognitive or social interactions actively undertaken by educators in face to face encounters with individual children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Irish Policy and Research Developments in ECEC

The year 2009 saw numerous policy measures related to ECEC introduced. These include the commencement of the implementation of *Síolta*, the national quality framework (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA], 2009a). The national early childhood curriculum framework (*Aistear*) was introduced (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009a). A consultation about ECEC workforce development began in 2009 (Department of Education and Science [DES] 2009a). Arising in part from the recommendations from the NCC (2009), children of three and four years of age now have a universal right to a *Free Pre-School Year* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA], 2009b).

A particular policy focus relates to children of three and four years of age living with the injustice of poverty (DES, 2005). The policy is entitled *DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)*. One of the ways in which it was proposed to "add value" (DES, 2005, p. 36) to voluntary, community and private early childhood services, in areas designated as disadvantaged by the DES, was to provide professional training and support "to embed quality early learning experiences for children" (DES, 2005, p. 33).

There is a sound research basis for the *DEIS* initiative. Cregan (2008) in a review of literature on linguistic variety and educational attainment identified that research has clearly articulated that many children of working-class families do not achieve academically as well as their middle-class counterparts. This educational under-achievement is associated with patterns of language use: "This lack of preparedness and

inability to function readily in the expected way may be critical for the learning of such children" (Cregan, 2008, p.23).

According to the NCC (2009, p. 12) "pre-primary education is considered the most important level of education in an individual's cognitive development, as educational progress is cumulative for most individuals". An initiative such as the universal *Free Pre-School Year* (OMCYA, 2009b) and targeted initiatives such as *DEIS* (DES, 2005) are therefore significant and promising (Start Strong[2], 2009). However, there is a dearth of knowledge of the actual practices being implemented within the community and voluntary early childhood sector in Ireland (McGough, Carey & Ware, 2006). McGough et al. (2006) conducted a study that focussed on the extent, nature and quality of ECEC provision for children with disabilities and children who are at risk of educational underachievement for reasons of socio-economic disadvantage who are aged from birth to six years. It was stated that "further research is necessary in order to establish a clearer picture of practice" (McGough et al., 2006, p.125). In particular, there is little published research on interactions between educators and young children in Ireland, despite their critical importance (Walsh & Cassidy, 2007).

However, it is recognised in Ireland that "interactions (between adults and young children and between children themselves) are at the core of the teaching/learning process" (Dunphy, 2008, p. 225). This idea is manifested by a review of research and a consultation process which was undertaken during the development of *Síolta*, the national framework for quality (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006a; CECDE, 2006b). Both emphasised the significance of

[2] Start Strong was originally called the Irish Childcare Policy Network (ICPN) when it was founded in 2004 as a coalition of organisations and individuals interested in progressing childcare and early learning policies in Ireland. The ECEC policy advocacy group evolved into Start Strong in 2009.

adult-child interactions in ensuring the quality of ECEC provision and thereby enhancing children's learning. As a result 'interactions' is one of the sixteen core standards of *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006b). Furthermore, *Aistear*, the national early childhood curriculum framework (NCCA, 2009a) includes guidelines for interactions as a support for educators (NCCA, 2009b).

Despite this emphasis on interactions, the topic has been rarely studied in Ireland in relation to three and four year old children. A national audit of research on ECEC from 1990-2006 noted that it is "surprising that this theme contains only seven publications" (Walsh & Cassidy, 2007, p. 146). Of the seven publications reported in the audit, just two relate to interactions within the context of voluntary, community or private ECEC settings; the remainder refer to interactions in infant classrooms in primary schools. One of the two publications refers to a set of broad ethical guidelines on professional conduct expected of members of the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) and deals primarily with the responsibilities of those providing or working in a childcare service (Smith, 2004). The remaining, and most relevant study in relation to interactions, is in the context of using interactional analysis of video recordings to support the development of relationships between educators and children (Connolly, 2006). However, that study refers to just one ECEC service for children of *less* than three years of age. Similarly, a more recent study has been reported which measures the sensitivity of caregivers' interactions with toddlers with a view to discovering if relationship training for educators enhances young children's language and learning (Dineen, 2009).

Despite recent research initiatives in Ireland in the area of ECEC, there remains a challenge in knowing where best to allocate resources. If Irish policy makers and

educators are committed to redressing the social injustice of children growing up in poverty in Ireland, attention must be paid to how children's early learning and development is being facilitated in areas designated as disadvantaged.

The Research Questions and Aims of this Study

This study questions the nature of the pedagogy, in particular the interactions, occurring in scheduled small group learning experiences (SGLEs), between early childhood educators and three and four year old children attending three selected ECEC settings in urban areas designated as disadvantaged. Focussing on one key element of effective pedagogy, 'extended purposive conversations', the question is further broken down as follows:

1. What priorities and practices underlie interactions in small group learning experiences from the educator's perspective?
2. What are the enabling and limiting features of extended purposive conversations?
3. What kind of institutional support structures are in place for educators to enhance interactions - how much attention and reflection is paid to promoting interactions in the settings?
4. What strategies can be recommended to enhance the educational experiences of three and four year old children in relation to interactions and contribute to effective pedagogy?

Drawing from socio-cultural theory (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2009), the literature on effective pedagogy outlined above (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), and the literature

on educational inequality (Bourdieu, 1986; Kellaghan, 2001; Lynch, 1999) a framework is proposed to analyse the research data.

The study aimed to generate a picture of practice in relation to interactions between educators and three to four year old children. The study focused on what has been identified in the literature as the key features of quality interactions between educators and children in ECEC settings in the context of pedagogical practice.

The objectives of the study were to review the literature on educational inequality and relevant policy and practice developments in relation to this cohort of children. In addition, the literature on pedagogy and interactions in relation to young children in Ireland and abroad was reviewed. The nature of educator-child interactions occurring in three selected ECEC settings in scheduled SGLEs was illuminated. The enabling and limiting features of pedagogical practice in relation to educator-child interactions were established. The ultimate aim of this small-scale study was to explicate and seek to address current challenges and constraints so that future educators could be assisted to maximise the unique opportunity they have to enrich children's learning and development.

The study is qualitative in nature, informed by an interpretive paradigm and adopts a case study research strategy. A purposive sample of three selected ECEC settings in urban areas designated as disadvantaged was used. The methods included profiling the setting, non-participant observations (using digital film, digital audio recorder and field notes to capture the data), debriefing dialogues, semi-structured exit interviews and film-stimulated reflective dialogues. Logs of the observation data were constructed to detail the full data content and to support decisions on what was to be transcribed. A coding schedule was designed to deductively code the interaction

behaviours, with flexibility to inductively code as required. The coding schedule was applied to the interactions between educators and children in selected small group learning experiences (SGLEs). The remaining SGLEs were the focus of the film-stimulated reflective dialogues. All data sets were read several times to establish the practices in the setting and the development of themes and sub-themes. A five stage process of data analysis was applied to all the data.

By focussing on interactions in their natural context, this original, albeit small-scale, study addresses certain research gaps identified in Ireland regarding educator-child interactions. ECEC policy may be informed as to where best to focus resources to enhance children's learning and development. Finally, and most importantly, the findings of this study have the potential to assist ECEC managers and educators to plan to optimise interactions during SGLEs and ultimately enhance the learning experiences for young children attending ECEC settings.

Terminology

This study is located in the context of educational inequality. Drawing from the work of Kellaghan (2001, p.5), children are regarded as being at a disadvantage at school if "the competencies and dispositions which he/she brings to school differ from the competencies and dispositions which are valued in schools and which are required to facilitate adaptation to school and school learning". See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

In Ireland, both the care and education sectors have developed independently with limited dialogue (Start Strong, 2009); Appendix 1 gives details of that development. It has been acknowledged that "care and education are inextricably linked elements in a

child's holistic development" (DES, 1999, p. 3; Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 1999, p. 45). In policy documents in Ireland, the term early childhood education and care is variously referred to as: 'early childhood education' (DES, 1999); 'childcare' (DJELR, 1999; Irish Childcare Policy Network, 2007); and 'early childhood education and care' (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). More recently, a consensus seems to have emerged on the term 'early childhood care and education' (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006a; OMCYA, 2009a) or 'early care and education' (Start Strong, 2010). In this study, the term 'early childhood education and care' is deliberately used to foreground that children are learning from birth, while also acknowledging the inextricable link between education and care.

Identified as the favoured term through consultations with providers in the sector, 'early childhood practitioner' is accepted by the ECEC community in Ireland (CECDE, 2006a). As the work titles of the study participants varied over the three settings, the author initially adopted the term 'practitioner'. However, as a result of conducting this study the term 'educator' is employed. This shift in terminology is influenced by Amelia Gambetti (2010) who highlighted that to concentrate on the word 'practice 'and avoid the word 'teacher' or 'educator' is to remove the theory from the practice. In this study the term educator is used to emphasise the educative nature of the role.

The study focuses on interactions in the context of pedagogical practice in early childhood settings. Rather than call these pedagogical interactions, they are referred to as interactions in this study. Pedagogical interactions and interactions are seen as synonymous to each other. In order to make the study manageable it was necessary to review the structure of the day within the settings and select the occasions which

provided significant opportunities for interactions between the educators and the children. The learning from the pilot study indicated that scheduled SGLEs would offer those opportunities. In the research settings these occasions were referred to as 'small group time' and 'small group work'. The term 'small group learning experiences' is defined as educator-initiated daily learning experiences designed for a small group of (in this study) five to eight children. The term is deliberately used to foreground the experiences as learning opportunities and to favour the language used in *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009a).

Extended purposive conversations are defined as dynamic, collaborative and dialogic exchanges characterised by interactions that enhance cognitive, social and linguistic skills in young children (see Chapter 3 for further discussion).

Author's History and Pre-suppositions

With a background in psychology, the author has worked as an early childhood educator, a family support worker and a community resource worker in Barnardos in areas marked by poverty. She has written about professional practice (French, 2000; 2003; 2008), and conducted evaluations of ECEC practice (French, 2003; 2005a). She is an endorsed trainer of the HighScope curriculum approach[3]. As a result she has assumptions/biases about professional practice and sees practice through a HighScope

[3] The HighScope model of education was designed by David Weikart and colleagues in the US beginning in 1962 '...in response to the persistent failures of high school students from Ypsilanti's poorest neighbourhoods' (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995, p.3). The model supports children from birth and emphasises authentic educator-child relationships, the provision of opportunities for active participatory learning and attention to the learning environment. Other core elements of this model include ongoing observation and assessment of children's learning and sharing educational experiences with their families. HighScope requires the establishment of a consistent but flexible daily routine incorporating planned small and whole group experiences and educator-child interactions focussing on sharing conversational control with children, participating in children's play and a problem-solving approach to learning. HighScope is continually being updated to reflect research on child development, the experience of practicing educators, the development of new theories and curriculum content standards (Epstein, 2007b).

lens. She has researched families' experiences of poverty and public services (French 2002; 2005b; 2006), and more recently is a lecturer in early childhood education. The author's work has consistently centred on children up to the age of five years, including their parents and educators. This work focus is underpinned by the belief that supporting all three ensures the best possible learning outcomes for children. From experience of growing up in a small provincial town, later work experience in Barnardos and as a researcher, the author has seen inequality at first hand. Through an accident of birth some children are born into families and environments that are blighted by poverty. Some of these families do not have the kind of cultural, social, emotional and educational supports that would enable their children to succeed in life to the same extent as wealthier children. However, in the researcher's experience the parents (mostly women) manage to put their children first and provide for them with creativity, resourcefulness, and hard work. They want the very best for their children, but are challenged continually by their life circumstances. The author believes in the transformative power of education and that children who may not have a great start in life through poverty could have their life chances enhanced by attendance in high quality ECEC settings (among other family supports). The author objects to the terms 'pre-school' and 'school-readiness'. ECEC is not a preparation for life; it is life itself for a very young child. Furthermore, the author believes that rather than children being made ready for school, schools should be made ready for children.

On the basis of experience and the research evidence outlined above and further discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 (Cregan, 2008; Schweinhart et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004a), the author is persuaded that high quality early childhood education and care is mediated through effective interactions between educators and young children. Quality interactions are important for all children, but particularly for children at risk of

educational under-achievement. These critical interactions warrant further study from a socio-cultural perspective. This perspective is premised on the idea that communication and language are at the core of teaching and learning, as opposed to compensating for perceived deficits within children (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

Thesis Structure

This thesis is set out in the following six chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on educational inequality and important ECEC policy developments. Chapter 3 elucidates the theoretical perspective on interactions in the context of pedagogical practice. In combination with Chapter 2, Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework for analysis. Chapter 4 presents the research design for this qualitative study. The process of conducting the study including the analysis is portrayed. The limitations of the study and how they are addressed are delineated. Chapter 5 presents portraits of the settings and the educators. The findings are presented and analysed in relation to pedagogical organisation, interactions and the content and delivery of the learning experiences. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the conclusions and recommendations regarding the nature of the pedagogy in relation to policy, practice and research.

CHAPTER 2 PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND ECEC POLICY IN IRELAND

The research question is framed within the context of ECEC settings in areas designated as disadvantaged. This chapter seeks to present a theoretical framework that will inform the analysis of the data. The concepts that underpin 'educational disadvantage' influence policy formation and implementation, in Ireland in relation to the children in this study. The first part of this chapter explores the definitional understandings of the term 'educational disadvantage', and concludes with a proposal to substitute the term 'educational disadvantage' with that of 'educational inequality'. The next part clusters the theorists' responses to educational inequality in relation to a deficit perspective, liberal equality and egalitarianism. In the third part linguistic theory and research is examined. Part four looks at the manner in which these perspectives inform policy positions and inspire particular interventions and initiatives with a particular focus on ECEC in communities marked by poverty.

Definitional Understandings of Educational Disadvantage

Significant emphasis has been placed on addressing educational disadvantage, since the early 1960s in the US (Coleman, 1968). In Ireland considerable regional and social class disparities in educational participation were identified (DES, 1966). The Irish policy response was to increase participation in education, rather than reduce educational disadvantage (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin & Morgan, 1995). Interest in the topic can be attributed to concerns relating to the loss of talent to the nation, civil and human rights concerns relating to poverty, and concerns about equality of educational opportunity (Kellaghan et al.). By the 1990s the term 'educational

disadvantage' was adopted for use in policy documents (Smyth & McCoy, 2009). In early debates there was a consensus that educational disadvantage referred to 'low achievers', 'poor performers' or those children who had not achieved high grades (National Economic and Social Council, 1993). Kellaghan et al. (1995) offered the following definition of educational disadvantage, it "is considered to result from discontinuities between children's knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the demands of schools" (Kellaghan et al, 1995, p xi).

A progressive development was the definition provided in the *Education Act (1998, Section 32 [9],* Ireland, 1998) which states that educational disadvantage " means the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools". 'Appropriate benefit', in this context, is generally understood to mean the opportunity for each person to achieve their full potential (Haran, 2004). The definition includes the impact of poverty and social class on a person's life chances. The definition has been reiterated in the *Education (Amendment) Bill 2010* (Ireland, 2010).

This definition is criticised by Kellaghan (2001) in his later work, as being overly broad, lacking in precision and failing to give guidance on appropriate educational interventions. He suggests that the definition ignores cultural factors (as distinct from economic or social disadvantage) and other 'impediments' at the core of disadvantage (Kellaghan). Finally, he suggests that understanding disadvantage may be achieved and problems associated with it may be addressed with a greater interrogation of these 'impediments'. Kellaghan (p. 5) proposes a new definition to "increase our knowledge of the precise difficulties children experience in school and of the origin of these

difficulties". The definition suggests that a child may be regarded as being at a disadvantage at school

> ...if because of factors in the child's environment conceptualized as economic, cultural and social capital, the competencies and dispositions which he/she brings to school differ from the competencies and dispositions which are valued in schools and which are required to facilitate adaptation to school and school learning. (Kellaghan, 2001, p. 5)

A development of the understandings presented in Kellaghan's previous work cited above (Kellaghan et al., 1995) is clear. The competencies and dispositions envisaged by Kellaghan were presented in various domains. The first domain is cognitive development and academic achievement such as acquiring and applying skills, knowledge and problem-solving. Kellaghan suggests that other domains may include conduct (self-regulation and ethical values), social behaviour (relationships with others) and self-development (identity, autonomy, and desire to succeed). Kellaghan's understanding of educational disadvantage has particular relevance to ECEC. The definition highlights the potential role of ECEC in enhancing children's competencies and dispositions and informing the school's attitudes towards those competencies and dispositions, thereby supporting children before they start school and increasing their chances of reaching their potential.

The language of 'educational disadvantage' is itself contested. As Gilligan (2005, p.27) indicates "linguistic analysis and conceptual formulation hold a central place in building inclusive education for all". The need to shift the conceptualisation from the deficit/compensation model (see next section) labelled 'educational disadvantage' to an understanding that promotes 'educational equality' was identified (e.g. Gilligan, 2005; 2007; Spring, 2007). This conceptualisation is influential in the analysis of the data

within this thesis. In recognition of this, the term 'educational inequality' rather than 'educational disadvantage' is used where possible from this point forward.

Theoretical Responses to Educational Inequality

Theoretical responses to educational inequality can be clustered. Some theorists view educational inequality from a deficit perspective. Some theorists view educational inequality from a liberal equality perspective. Some theorists view educational inequality from an egalitarian perspective.

The deficit perspective attributes educational inequality to a deficit within the child or family. One of the oldest theoretical debates, within the sociology of education, to explain social difference and educational attainment is in relation to whether attainment is as a result of children's genetic inheritance (nature) or the influence of their environment (nurture). The results of seminal studies led to the assumption that social inequalities are reflective of innate intelligence, which in turn leads to success in school and life (e.g. Dunn, 1987; Herrnstein & Murray, 1997; Jensen, 1969). Therefore, these studies gave rise to a number of programmes to compensate for alleged deficits. Herrnstein and Murray (1997) proposed that compensatory education for disadvantaged black American children was unsuccessful because of their low Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores. Jensen and Herrnstein and Murray similarly argued that class structure was directly related to IQ differences between social groups. In the context of ECEC this 'deficit view' would support the development of programmes with a very low cognitive ambition.

On the nurture side of the deficit debate is the 'deprivation theory' (e.g. Bereiter & Englemann, 1966), which argues that school failure is due to the lack of stimulation

in the home. In this instance, the researchers seem to blame families for their children's lack of school attainment. "Sociocultural background...teaches children things specifically relevant to how they function as students ... in order to "catch up: disadvantaged children have to learn at a faster than normal rate" (Bereiter, 1987, p.1). To remedy the deficiencies of 'verbal deprivation' that they believed to exist, the researchers developed the *Academically Oriented Preschool* designed to teach back children how to speak standard English (e.g. Bereiter & Englemann).

Other researchers focused on teacher expectations. A deficit perspective on children's abilities in schools is manifested in the low expectations of some teachers (Archer and Weir, 2004). A seminal study was conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in the US (1968). They were concerned that low teacher expectations of children living in poverty were contributing to the high rates of failure among these students. The researchers demonstrated that if teachers expected enhanced performance from some children, then the children did indeed show that enhancement. The 'high performers' demonstrated, on average, an increase of more than 12 points on their IQ scores, compared to an increase of eight points among the rest of the students. The question could be raised as to what relevance the Rosenthal and Jacobson's study has to young children of three and four years of age in settings in areas designated as disadvantaged in Ireland? Of relevance to this study is that the differences in the IQ scores were even larger in the early grades with increases in IQ of up to 20 points. In essence, the younger the child the greater the impact of teacher expectation's on the child's IQ scores. The reason for this is unclear. It was hypothesised that younger children by virtue of their age may be easier to change; they have less established reputations in the school or they may be more sensitive to the nuances of teacher's expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson). Rosenthal posited that biased expectancies can essentially affect reality and create self-

fulfilling prophecies as a result. The children, subtly influenced by the teacher, may have developed positive conceptions of themselves, their abilities, their behaviours, their motivation and cognitive skill. This study highlights the importance of working with all educators. In the context of ECEC, it is crucially important that educators demonstrate high expectations of the children.

'Deficit thinking', as coined by Valencia (1997), is characterised by a number of elements. One of these elements is to blame the individual. Failure to achieve can be explained by a cognitive deficit within the person, arising from membership of a particular group, usually of low socio-economic status. For young children struggling to engage with the demands of school, this perspective allows the school to regard this circumstance as beyond the school's control. The deficit model could be seen as a form of pseudo-science redolent with researcher bias (e.g. Bereiter & Englemann, 1966; Jensen, 1969). The alleged deficits appear to be transmitted through 'inferior' genes, 'inferior' culture or class, or 'inferior' family socialisation, leading to a negative view of an entire social group (Valencia).

The work of Bourdieu clarifies understandings of educational equality and is reflected in Kellaghan's (2001) definition. It avoids the deficit model which blames families for not being middle class and instead points to diverse cultural practices (Lareau, 2001). Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'capitals' offers a theoretical base in order to explain the dynamic that continues to perpetuate intergenerational inequality and marginalisation within the education system. It highlights the social advantage that the dominant class have. The deficit model is based on the dominant orthodoxy of the time. The model is oppressive because power resides with the supporters of that model, usually the dominant middle-classes, rather than the minority economically

disadvantaged students. Social advantage is reproduced and equality of condition is frustrated.

Bourdieu (1986) uses the concepts of *habitus, field* and *capitals* (*economic, social and cultural*), to examine classed cultural practices and their production and reproduction within the educational field. 'Habitus' refers to deeply internalised dispositions (tendencies or capacities), acquired over time through everyday experiences in and outside the home, which predisposes people to act in unconscious and characteristic ways. In relation to ECEC, habitus is developed from early childhood. The habitus (competencies and dispositions) some children develop will match more closely the values of the school. It is important for ECEC educators to nurture dispositions (enduring habits of mind) for creative and critical thinking, problem-solving and communicating. 'Field' refers to the standards within which the social structures create the 'rules of the game' and the individual experiences of 'playing the game' that ensue. In relation to ECEC children need to learn the rules of the 'education game' in order to maximise the benefits of educational experiences. 'Capitals' refer to the economic, social and cultural resources that are available to an individual, families and communities.

Economic capital refers to material and financial resources (Kellaghan, 2001). In Ireland many of the indicators used to identify disadvantage are related to poverty (e.g. in receipt of a medical card, or social welfare). The absence of economic capital constitutes poverty (Kellaghan). Social capital is embodied in relationships between individuals in informal and formal social networks. Of particular relevance to this thesis is cultural capital. Cultural capital consists of three forms. The first, of particular relevance to ECEC, comprises personal dispositions (habitus). In the second form,

cultural capital is 'objectified' in cultural goods (pictures, books, musical instruments). The third form is institutionalised as, for example, in educational qualifications. Critically, Bourdieu (1986) signalled that language is important; it is not only a means of communication, it enables one to understand and manipulate complex logical and aesthetic structures. He criticised the educational system as it "demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 495). Those demands consist mainly of linguistic and cultural competence (a point referred to later). Cultural competence consists of that "relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture" (Bourdieu, p. 495).

Parents' level of education and their occupation, the quality of adult-child interactions (where events and ideas are discussed), and parents' expectations for children are intrinsic elements of cultural capital. Kellaghan (2001, p. 9) suggests "that the value of cultural capital will vary with the 'markets' in which it can be used advantageously... capital required for success in school is defined by the dominant social groups in society". The unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes has, in part, been explained through cultural capital. Children "who bring the 'right' kind of capital to school will do well" (Kellaghan, p. 9). As argued by Lareau (2001), some schools translate working-class culture into working-class deficiency and failures.

Bourdieu has been criticised as being reductionist (Bilton et al., 2002), as his view is conceived to be based on environmental influences (nurture). It is acknowledged that both nature and the environment interact in complex ways (Bilton et al., 2002). He has also been criticised because the theory lacked the qualities of chance and spontaneity

that exist when individuals are active agents in their own lives (Bilton, et al.). In the author's view, Bourdieu neglected to include an emotional component as one of his capitals; forming attachments is critical to learning and development, particularly for young children and is important in this study (Bowlby, 1982; 1988). See Chapter 3 Establishing Supportive Interpersonal Relationships for further discussion. A strong argument could be made that sufficient emotional resilience, and self belief could offset some inequalities (O'Brien & Flynn, 2007). However, Bourdieu has advanced the way we interrogate educational inequality. His theories suggest that schooling reproduces relations of inequality between classes and other social categories. One of the ways that this is compounded is through linguistic capital. Children as young as four years of age have not acquired the linguistic capital required to engage with the educational system. See next section for a discussion of language within the context of educational inequality.

An alternative perspective to the deficit model is a more liberal perspective in relation to tackling educational inequality. O'Brien (2002, p.16) states that educational inequality is located in the liberal view of equality of opportunity which is "underpinned by hegemonic 'meritocratic' assumptions...that those who are academically able and make the effort 'deserve' to and can succeed in the education system irrespective of class and cultural background". It suggests that interventions can be made so that individual students irrespective of their class origins and socio-economic backgrounds can succeed once they play within the rules of meritocracy. O'Brien (p.16) explained that traditionally the solutions lay in promoting interventions that would enhance the educational experiences and performances of working class students so they could catch up on their middle class peers.

The concept of equality as outlined by Lyons and Waldron (2005) is complex and lends itself to many interpretations ranging from the French revolution's minimalist concept of *égalité,* to the radical idea of equality of condition propounded by the critical theorists and feminists. It is recognised in Ireland that education has rarely managed to promote basic forms of equality (e.g. Lynch, 2005a; DES, 2005). Lynch (1999, p. 30) argues that "sociologists have been working out of a liberal political philosophy for most of their work" and have failed to define egalitarian objectives. An assumption is made that effective equal opportunities polices can be implemented in and through education without "radical equality of political and economic condition".

This kind of equality of condition (egalitarianism) calls for radical systemic change. Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004, p. 23) provide a broad framework as one attempt at defining equality, which resonates with the author, and identified five dimensions of equality (respect and recognition; resources; love, care and solidarity; power; working and learning). In relation to ECEC, a radical approach to respect and recognition embraces difference (Baker et al.). Difference is respected and should be learned from, rather than tolerated from a dominant position. It is thus important to have open dialogue. Gilligan (2005) suggests that we need to learn about difference and self-identify rather than focus on 'sameness' to provide a more inclusive future.

Dominant economically and culturally advantaged groups have more access to power in democracy than disadvantaged groups. Crucially, Baker et al. (2004, p. 30) point out that liberal democracy and its conception of liberal equality "are in line with the general idea that liberal equality is about regulating inequality rather than eliminating it". Equality of power within a radical approach challenges forms of power such as parents over children and men over women. In the context of ECEC the power

of educators over children is challenged. In one study, located in primary schools with six and seven year old (and older) children, the participation of children in decision making on matters which impacted on them was discounted by teachers and lack of participation observed by the researcher (Devine, 2000). One reason for the lack of consultation with the children was ideological. As reported by the teachers children needed to learn self control and were too immature to be consulted. Practical reasons of large class size and time constraints were also reported (Devine, 2000). Children's immaturity and innocence justified the teacher's need to direct and control the children's behaviour. The priorities and interests of the teachers predominated (Devine, 2000). In the context of ECEC a radical egalitarian approach proposes a democratic, cooperative model of education, characterised by respect and parity of esteem.

A radical egalitarian approach to equality is ambitious, challenging and offers an alternative to the liberal perspective of equality of opportunity. However, such an approach will take enormous political, social and structural change which will take significant time. In the meantime a focus on the education of young children whilst incorporating the ideas of the theorists in the development of ECEC, in particular habitus (dispositions and competencies), equality of esteem, and respect for difference should be pursued. A radical approach to equality calls for systemic change. In relation to ECEC such an approach would mean that young children living in poverty would be given every support possible to enable them to be empowered within a radically overhauled education system. This egalitarian perspective questions the normativity of sameness implied in the liberal perspective and embraces the normativity of difference. Such an approach is necessary, in the author's view. The next section reviews how linguistic theory and research reflects different positions in tackling educational

inequality from a deficit perspective through a liberal understanding of equality to an egalitarian perspective. It begins with a reflection on language variation and acquisition.

Language within the Context of Educational Inequality

The field of sociolinguistics has identified the variation that exists among the speakers of a language and the association of that variation with social class (Cregan, 2008). The term 'language variation' implies that there are differences within any one language (Cregan). Standard language consists of the written and spoken, formal and informal 'correct' variety. This variety is used by professionals and others in the educated upper and middle-classes and is valued. Non-standard variety, by implication, consists of the variety used by working-class people and is undervalued (Cregan). Despite credible research which counters the perceived 'inferiority' of non-standard language (e.g. Labov, 1969), speakers of non-standard language are judged negatively on the basis of accent, syntax, vocabulary (Cregan).

There is persuasive evidence that some children brought up in families living with the injustice of poverty have a tendency to have lesser spoken language skills than children reared in wealthier circumstances (Locke, Ginsberg & Peers, 2002). A longitudinal study conducted by Hart and Risley (1995) found progressive differences in the language abilities and experiences of children from families classified into three main groups. These were professional families, working-class families and families who were dependant on social welfare. Whilst the children from all three groups started to speak at about the same time and also developed good structure and use of language, their vocabulary as measured by the number of different words used varied significantly. By age three, the observed cumulative vocabulary for children in the

professional families was about 1,100, for the working-class families, it was about 750, and for the welfare families it was just above 500. A high correlation between vocabulary size at age three and language test scores at ages nine and ten in areas of vocabulary, listening, syntax (sentence structure, grammar, language rules), and reading comprehension was evidenced (Hart & Risley). Parental interaction strategies associated with higher vocabulary in children were identified. These included warmth and few prohibitions, asking rather than directing children, listening and responsiveness, a wide use of vocabulary with high information content (Hart & Risley). This has implications for the significance of educator-child interactions in ECEC settings in areas designated as disadvantaged and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Studies have similarly demonstrated that language competence is positively correlated with success in the educational system (e.g. Cregan, 2008; Riley, Burrell & McCallum, 2004). Schools are institutions "which function through the medium of language and considers the teaching of that standard language to all as its first and fundamental task" (Cregan, p.14). Some children start school with the non-standard variety language. Such children have not acquired the linguistic capital of advantaged students. There is a discontinuity between the language of the school and of the children; due to a mismatch of language use.

From a deficit theory perspective this eventuality can be explained by the lack of stimulation in the home (e.g. Bereiter & Englemann, 1966) compounded by immersion in a poor linguistic model resulting in children being unable to communicate and express themselves through language (Bernstein, 1971). Bernstein's theory of elaborated and restricted codes provides an even more intractable and profound rationalisation for the deficit model. Bernstein argues that there is a qualitative difference between middle-class speech and lower working-class speech. The

differences do not lie in grammar, slang or dialect, but in the uses of vocabulary and the grammatical system. Whereas Bernstein did not define what he meant by middle-class and working-class, the two classes can be said to use different codes. These different codes arise from different socialisation experienced in the home. The codes are expressed in a different form of language (Rosen, 1972). Bernstein (p. 318) claimed that

> It is not the case that working-class children do not have in their passive vocabulary the vocabulary used by middle-class children. Nor is it the case that they differ in their tacit use of the linguistic rule system. Rather what we have here are differences in the use of language arising out of a specific context.

Bernstein believed that the language of the middle-class child generated 'elaborated' and universalistic meanings, free from the context, and understood by all. The speech of the working-class child generated 'restricted' and particularistic meanings, which are tied to the context and would be only understood by people with access to the same context. Later in his work (as the above quote suggests), Bernstein claimed that he had been misunderstood and that he was in the 'language variation' camp which recognised difference rather than the 'deficit' camp. However, in the author's opinion the very label of the term 'restricted' implies that he felt that there was a deficit in the social milieu in which the children lived.

Both the deficit and the liberal model of equal opportunities would suggest a compensatory response which, Edwards (1989, p. 48) cogently argues, is "saturated in middle-class bias and prejudices against certain speech styles". The assumption is that these deficits can be 'fixed' through the provision of educational opportunities to both the children and their parents. This disrespectful depiction of people as pitiable, contributes to keeping them in their 'place', as opposed to empowering them to rise above their present economic and corresponding social status.

The egalitarian model would provide a more constructive approach to addressing educational inequality and an analysis that recognises the validity of different speech styles. The work of Labov (1969) which valued the non-standard language use of these children was influential in the work of later researchers (e.g. Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Wells, 1985a):

> It is now generally accepted that culturally and linguistically different children are not non-verbal, do not lack experiences and are not culturally disadvantaged. They have language but it is not standard, middle-class English. They come to school with perhaps as many experiences as other children but not the experiences that appear to be critical in achieving academic success. For them the major difficulty is learning how to handle the scholastic demands of the dominant culture that is significantly different in many respects from their own. (Cregan, 2008, p. 19)

If there is no deficit in the language of children living with the injustice of poverty then there is nothing to compensate for. A more appropriate response to a limited vocabulary is to "broaden a child's linguistic repertoire" while accepting the diversity of their language variation (Edwards, 1989, p. 48). When juxtaposed with power relations and patterns of domination these ideas resonate with Bourdieu (1991). Bourdieu refers to how linguistic exchanges, which are relations of the highest order of communication, also actualise the power relations among speakers or groups. The dominant language is the standard variety of the official national language and is used as an instrument of power – a form of cultural capital (linguistic capital).

The challenge now should be on schools to acknowledge and take responsibility for the diversity of language varieties. However, it is beyond the remit of this study to discuss the accusation that schools are perpetuating inequality by failing to recognise the variety of language use (MacRuairc, 1997, cited in Cregan, 2008). What is of relevance is that certain types of language use are more valued in schools. Some children use language which enables them to engage in school language experiences.

ECEC educators are in a critical position to value the diversity of children's language use and enhance children's language capacity through engaging them in the kind of discourse expected but not explicitly taught in schools (Bourdieu, 1986; Cregan, 2008).

A policy focus on children's development of thinking and language through interactions with skilled educators is achievable. In the author's view, influenced by an egalitarian perspective, these interactions must be respectful of the linguistic experience of the children, with conversations being built and extended on the child's existing vocabulary. Furthermore, it is considered that corrective teaching could be counterproductive. Attempts at correction or instruction may foster linguistic insecurity, which is the exact opposite of what is desired (Edwards, 1989), particularly for the self–esteem of very young children. Notwithstanding the possibility of causing psychological distress to young children by formally instructing them in standard variety language, there is little evidence that such an approach would work (Edwards, 1989). What is appropriate is for educators to respect the children (and their families), value the diversity of their language use, consistently model the standard variety, whilst organising an atmosphere where children are not made self-conscious about their language use. This perspective militates against the "soft bigotry of low expectations" so inherent within communities experiencing inequality (Cuban, 2006).

The decades of research on educational inequalities have offered a number of alternative views, from the extreme of the deficit discourse to a more nuanced understanding of the discourse of equality and valuing difference and diversity. Education is an extremely complex and multi-layered practice. To overcome educational inequality a radical approach, informed by the egalitarian model of systemic change, must be undertaken. Any intervention will need to be comprehensive, providing

a wide range of services and supports if it is to address the multi-faceted origins of educational inequality. In doing so the full complexity of achieving educational equality must be considered including embracing diversity, rather than perpetuating a negative emphasis on disadvantage and difference. There is a moral and ethical imperative that the focus of public policy and public spending on education is on reducing inequalities, not simply compensating for disadvantage. The policy environment is now considered, in relation to the children in this study.

ECEC Policy in Ireland

The manner in which countries approach ECEC is influenced by their social and economic traditions, their understandings of families and young children and by accumulated research on the benefits of quality early childhood settings (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2006). Theories of educational inequality also influence policy formation. However, the development of ECEC policy in Ireland has been fragmentary arising in response to a variety of political expedients (NESF, 2005; NESC, 2009) and rarely underpinned by legislation (Hayes & Bradley, 2009). See Appendix 1 for details of the particular political, socio-economic, child poverty, legislative and policy context for the development of ECEC in Ireland. To date, there has been a lack of a national vision and direction for ECEC (Start Strong, 2010).

The following analysis centres on topics most pertinent to the focus of this thesis: state investment in ECEC, provision of ECEC in areas of disadvantage, quality assurance and standards, and workforce development. Policies in relation to these areas directly impact on the quality and the practices of ECEC settings, and consequently the quality of the interactions between educators and young children.

State Investment in ECEC

The *National Childcare Investment Programme* (NCIP) 2006 - 2010 was a programme of investment in the childcare infrastructure (see www.omc.ie). It was anticipated that by the end of 2010 the programme would have created up to 90,000 new childcare places (a combination of full and part time places), with the objective of assisting parents to access affordable, quality childcare. The NCIP programme reflects the biggest investment in childcare in Irish history. As a result the main thrust of ECEC policy development to date has been on equality measures to provide childcare places in order to support women's participation in the workforce. In policy and practice "quality within settings... received minimal attention throughout the period of rapid market growth" (Hayes & Bradley, 2009, p.35). The NCIP stems from a liberal equal opportunities perspective.

Although early childhood education has demonstrated benefits for children, the participation rates in State-funded pre-primary provision were extremely low in Ireland, compared with other countries. Figure 2 demonstrates European participation rates.

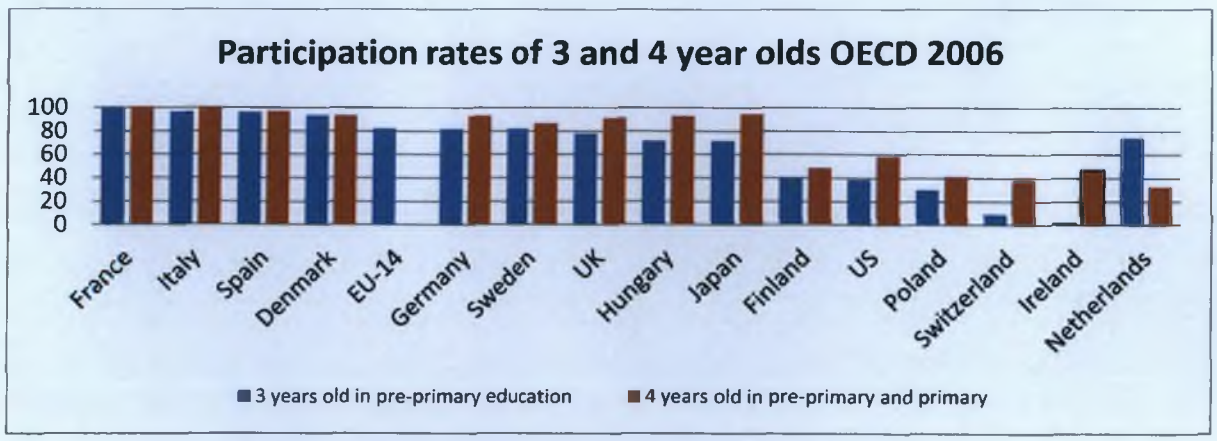

Figure 2 Participation rates of three and four year olds in ECEC

Source: Eurostat Key Statistics 2006 (Eurostat, 2008)

The announcement of the abolition of the *Early Childcare Supplement*[4], and its replacement with a *Free Pre-School Year - Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme* demonstrated for the first time the State's commitment to recognise the value of early education, albeit in strictly economic terms. With the *Free Pre-School Year* it would appear that ECEC policy is now being developed consistent with international and national recommendations. It also created a considerable saving to the exchequer. Figure 3 illustrates the exchequer savings in replacing the ECS with the *Free Pre-School Year*.

Early Childcare Supplement	***Free Pre-School Year* in ECCE scheme**
Allocation of €1,104 per annum per child up to the age of 5½	Allocation of approx €2,425 (once off annual payment)
Cost to the State €480 million in 2008	€170 million projected cost (when fully implemented)

Figure 3 Financial implications of replacing ECS with *Free Pre-School Year* Scheme
Source: Financial Statement of the Minister for Finance, 7 April 2009

This pragmatic decision was cited as "an example of how a programme can be reshaped and made more effective at a lower cost to the taxpayer. We need to see more such initiatives in the public sector" (Minister for Finance, 2009, p. A.12). The *Free Pre-School Year* will be delivered through existing community, voluntary and statutory settings through per capita grant aid. However, as highlighted, by McGough et al. (2006) little is known about the actual practices within these settings. To begin with we cannot know whether the State investment in the universal preschool year and other initiatives will meet its aspirations if we don't know about the quality of the learning on

[4] The *Early Childcare Supplement* was an annual grant to every child under the age of five years, intended to pay for childcare, should families require it. It was introduced in 2006 and withdrawn in 2009.

offer. It could be argued that this investment represents a liberal equality of opportunity perspective. The resources are being spread across all children. An egalitarian approach would involve a more focussed investment in ECEC settings, ECEC educators, families and children who attend settings in designated areas of disadvantage.

An egalitarian approach is necessary. The OECD (2009) report on the welfare of children in 30 countries has found that Ireland is among the worst performing nations when it comes to the amount of money spent on general child welfare. While there is no simple causal link between poverty and educational inequality, there is an increased likelihood of children in poverty experiencing school failure (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000, see Appendix 1 for statistics on child poverty). Parental education and social class background are significantly linked to the educational outcomes of young people in Ireland (Smyth & McCoy, 2009). Smyth and McCoy emphasised the importance of early education, concluding that targeting formal schooling solely will not address the needs of young people living with poverty. ECEC is rooted in the continuum of lifelong learning which begins at birth (OECD, 2006). Targeted investment in high quality ECEC for children in areas designated as disadvantaged can reap benefits for the children directly and also for the parents of young children who get the opportunity to attend further education and training (Hayes, 2005). There is a pressing need for intergenerational education as a pathway out of poverty.

In Ireland there is any amount of rhetoric which calls for targeted investment. The call to invest in ECEC was consistently repeated (NCC, 2009; NESC, 2009; Smith & McCoy, 2009) with the extension that the settings needed to be sustainable and of high quality (French, 2005a; Irish Childcare Policy Network, 2007; Start Strong, 2009). The NESC (2009), from both a child well-being and economic perspective, advocate for

investment in ECEC as a policy priority during the current economic recession. Whilst acknowledging the crisis in public finances, the NCC in their *Statement on Education and Training* similarly argue that, "the case for targeting expenditure where returns are greatest remains strong" (NCC, 2009, p. 20).

It would be naïve to suggest that early education programmes can ameliorate institutional discrimination or structural poverty. Measures such as social housing, increased social welfare, comprehensive social and family policies, and labour force training must also be adopted (Bennett, 2006). Likewise, it would be wrong to suggest that the Irish Government is not investing in children. According to the *National Development Plan* (NDP, Ireland, 2007b, p. 239) the Government has budgeted over 12 billion euro in the "Children Programme over the period of the Plan (2007-2013)". However, it is anticipated that a new NDP will be produced to accommodate restructuring of policy priorities. Now, more than ever, educational disadvantage must be addressed to prevent future intergenerational cycles of poverty (NCC, 2009).

Provision of ECEC in Ireland in Areas of Disadvantage

Historically in Ireland, ECEC has been characterised by a clear division between the care and education sectors (OECD, 2004). This 'split system' is demonstrated by the provision of infant classes for four to five year olds falling within the education system, provided on a universal basis with graduate-level teachers (Start Strong, 2010). In areas of socio-economic disadvantage and low educational achievement the *Early Start Pre-School Pilot Project* was launched by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 1994 as "a one year targeted intervention for three year old children considered most at risk of not reaching their potential within the education system" (OECD, 2004, p. 32).

It has remained a pilot (see also Appendix 2). 'Childcare' within a model of welfare support targeted at disadvantaged areas and with an often unqualified workforce was developed (Start Strong, 2010). ECEC for children of three and four years of age living in poverty is currently provided by the voluntary, community[5] and statutory sector (CECDE, 2004). For these young children there is a diversity of early intervention service provision supported by different funding streams from different departments; differing philosophies and approaches, such as HighScope, Froebel, Montessori, Steiner, and play based curricula, and differing pedagogic practices (CECDE, 2004).

A significant development of particular relevance to three and four year old children living with poverty is *DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005, see Appendix 2 for further information on *DEIS*). In the plan it is stated that the DES's particular contribution to early childhood education provision for children in the year before they start school "...will be to provide funding or part-funding for the educational dimension of provision, where new places are involved, and on supporting the further development of an educational dimension in the case of existing childcare provision" (DES, 2005, p. 33). This plainly illustrates a policy imperative to enhance the educational experiences of young children in ECEC in areas blighted by educational inequality.

The early education element of *DEIS, Early Start, Prevention and Early intervention Programme* (see Appendix 2 for further information), and the Health Service Executive direct funded community and voluntary settings are all targeted

[5] In general the roots of service development in the voluntary sector can be traced to philanthropic and charitable organisations, many of whom were church based; the community sector tended to be smaller than voluntary organisations and to respond to local needs with an ethos of social inclusion (CECDE, 2004).

interventions. Although like *Early Start* none of these interventions, including the new universal year, are underpinned by legislation equal to that enjoyed by the primary, secondary, and tertiary education sectors. However, ECEC, outside of the primary education sector, is still in the early stages of development in Ireland.

ECEC Regulation and Implementation of Quality Assurance and Standards

Early childhood settings outside of the education system were unregulated until 1997. The voluntary and community sectors adhere to the *Child Care (Pre-School Settings) Regulations* (DH, 1996, termed *Regulations* from this point forward). As noted by the OECD (2004, p. 59), the *Regulations* are "basically a licence to practice, but do not include sufficient incentives to train, employ qualified staff or continually improve expertise". Revised *Regulations* came into force in September, 2007 (DHC, 2007). For the first time, children's learning and development is addressed. The *Regulation 5* stipulates that:

> A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context (Department of Health and Children, 2006, Part II, *Regulation 5*).

The implementation of the *Regulations* is a key component in the overall implementation of the related commitments contained in *'Towards 2016'* (Ireland, 2006) including establishing improved administrative systems to facilitate a national standardised inspection service and ensuring that standardised inspection reports are publicly available. However, the *Regulations* are still minimal. Childcare settings are inspected by the Preschool Inspectorate, which was formed originally to implement the *Regulations* in 1996. Inspection teams of an environmental health officer and a public

health nurse conduct inspections annually to ensure notified settings are in compliance with the *Regulations*. A health-and-hygiene approach to regulation is evident in Ireland (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010, p.11). There is no mandated registration system in Ireland and no expertise in the Inspectorate in monitoring *Regulation 5* (NCNA, 2010). Even though these standards are minimal they are not fully implemented. The NCNA annual survey found that 31% of their members did not receive their annual inspection visit. This is reported to be due to the inadequate numbers of inspectors (NCNA). Additionally, there are inconsistencies and variations in how inspections are conducted (Barnardos, 2010). These issues and the potentially negative impact on the quality of the settings remain outstanding.

Two developments, mentioned in Chapter 1, have enormous potential to accomplish the objective of enhancing the quality of young children's experiences of ECEC in Ireland. These are *Síolta*, the *National Framework for Quality* (CECDE, 2006a) and *Aistear,* the *Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009a). Neither of these developments is underpinned by legislation. Importantly, as discussed, both place particular significance on interactions between educators and children and offer guidelines. One important difference between the two *Frameworks* is their focus. *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009a) focuses on planning for the provision of enriching, challenging and enjoyable learning experiences for children. *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006a) sets the broad context for ensuring quality in ECEC settings within which early learning is best supported. This includes standards in relation to organisational considerations in addition to standards for adherence to legislation, to establishing a learning environment and so on. According to the OMCYA (2009b) any settings:

> ...who wish to participate in the *Free Pre-School Year* must agree to provide an appropriate educational programme for children in their pre-school year, which adheres to the principles of *Síolta*. Services will be supported in meeting this requirement through the assistance of *Síolta* Co-ordinators and by their local City and County Childcare Committee. (OMCYA, p. 2)

At the time of writing twenty-one people are appointed as *Síolta* co-ordinators, all of whom are on short term contracts. It could be argued that the impact of their valuable work must be restricted by the volume of work that is required to implement *Síolta* effectively for the 90,000 children availing of the *Free Pre-School Year*, attending ECEC settings throughout Ireland. There are no implementation plans for *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009a). Furthermore, there is no funding for the education and training of ECEC personnel in order for them to translate *Aistear* into everyday practice, planning and supervision.

In order to implement policy, educators need to understand the policy and policy makers need to appreciate the working conditions of the implementers. A cognitive perspective contributes to an understanding of policy implementation "by unpacking how implementing agents construct ideas from and about state and national standards" (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002, p.420). A top-down, bottom-up approach is advocated for the implementation of standards. In such a scheme "the ideas about changing behaviour that implementing agents construct from a policy" involves the policy signal; the implementing agents' knowledge, beliefs, and experience; and the circumstances in which the local actor makes sense of policy (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 420). As expressed by Stone (2002, p.28) "...interpretations are more powerful than facts". Ideas from policy provide leverage for change only if policymakers persuade implementing agents to think in a different way about their actions, to question their current behaviour and therefore enable them to create other ways of acting. In Ireland,

there is no persuasion by policy makers. Without comprehensive implementation plans there will be little possibility for educators in ECEC settings to reflect on their practice and consider how to enhance children's learning. This is particularly important for children at risk of educational inequality as research highlighted in Chapters 1 and 3 has identified the significant benefits derived from participation in high quality early childhood education in terms of later educational attainment (OECD, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2004).

A lack of training of early childhood educators was identified as a particularly pressing problem in Ireland (OECD, 2004). It will be argued in Chapter 3 that engaging children in extended purposive conversations (EPCs) can promote the cognitive, linguistic and social development of three and four year old children, particularly those living with poverty (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Engaging in extended purposive conversations with children requires understandings, knowledge and skill. It is acknowledged that in order to meet current and future ECEC policy commitments the workforce needs to be developed (DES, 2009a). Literature and research are clear that children's thinking and language is enhanced when children are listened to and supported, when a range of pedagogical interaction strategies are used, and when children are encouraged to solve problems (Tayler, 2001). These skills require professional development. Therefore, professional preparation is arguably one of the features most relevant to interactions (Tayler).

Workforce Development and Specifying Pedagogy in ECEC

In relation to the provision of ECEC, primary schooling is the older and stronger tradition in Ireland. Teachers in primary schools in Ireland enjoy professional training

and development, adequate remuneration and unionisation (OECD, 2004). They have a status as respected professionals (Moloney, 2010). In contrast, the field of ECEC, outside of the primary system, has recently emerged. It is disparate in development due to the fragmented nature of early childhood provision (OECD, 2004). The sector is generally characterised by low levels of pay, poor working conditions, a lack of ECEC qualifications and ongoing training and remains predominantly female (OECD, 2004; OECD, 2006). Furthermore, educators feel undervalued as professionals. They feel that their role is seen by parents as 'just minding' children and as something that anybody can do without training (Moloney, 2010).

It is recognised in Irish policy documents that the role of the adult is central to enhancing the quality of young children's experiences with the requirement that those who work in ECEC settings should have relevant qualifications (DES, 1999; DJELR, 1999; DJELR, 2002; CECDE, 2006a; DES, 2009a). Up to the announcement of the *Free Pre-School Year*, in 2009 in Ireland, there were no standard qualification requirements in ECEC, outside of the primary system. In order to avail of the grant to deliver the pre-school year, at a minimum, pre-school staff are required to hold a Level 5 qualification in ECEC (OMCYA, 2009c). There is an incentive for a higher grant if the leader holds a Level 7 qualification[6]. Figure 4 provides an explanation of the qualifications in relation to the *National Framework of Qualifications* (NFQ).

[6] To qualify for the standard capitation rate of grant (€2,450 per eligible child per annum), the pre-school leader is required to hold a qualification in childcare/early education at a minimum of Level 5 or its equivalent on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). To qualify for the higher capitation rate of €2,850 the pre-school leader must hold a childcare or early years education qualification at Level 7 or Level 8 on the NFQ or equivalent and have 3 years experience working in the sector. Pre-school assistants must hold a childcare relevant qualification equivalent to Level 5 on the NFQ in these settings (OMCYA, 2009c).

Occupational Profile	NFQ Level	Comment
Basic Practitioner	Level 4	This may need to equate to a major award or the best fit may be to a minor or special purpose award at that level
Intermediate Practitioner	Level 5	This would generally equate to a major award (FETAC Level 5 Certificate) while it may also equate to a minor or a special purpose award
Experienced Practitioner	Level 6	This would generally equate to a FETAC Advanced Certificate at Level 6
Advanced Practitioner	Level 7/8	This would equate to at least an Ordinary Bachelor Degree
Expert Practitioner	Level 8/9	This would equate to at least an Honours Bachelor Degree

Figure 4 Mapping of model framework and NFQ qualifications for *Free Pre-School Year*
Source: DES (2009, p.44)

The incentive to attain a qualification in ECEC is both significant and warranted. Research has demonstrated the connection between appropriate training and staff support, including proper remuneration and good working conditions with access to professional development, with quality provision (Bowman, Donovan and Burns, 2001; OECD, 2006; DES, 2009a). It is encouraging to note that the sector itself has demonstrated a commitment towards the recognition and development of a qualified status for professional practitioners. The *Association of Childcare Professionals* (ACP) was established in 2007 in Cork and the four Dublin based County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are supporting the development of a Dublin Branch (Dun Laoghaire – Rathdown CCC, 2010). However, the absence of the term 'education' in the title of ACP is regrettable. It is a manifestation of how the language of 'childcare' dominates the discourse of early childhood educators.

The *Workforce Development Plan* was published in early 2011 (DES, 2011). The aspiration is that it will contribute to meeting the recommendation to improve the professional education and working conditions of ECEC educators (OECD, 2006). In Ireland there is a considerable range of perspectives on professional practice and pedagogy varying from "a highly formalised subject-oriented school teaching approach

to a play based informal approach with little learning taking place" (OECD, 2004, p. 60). It is clear from research that curricula which support child-directed learning through play result in better outcomes for young children (Laevers, 2005). For children, living in poverty in Ireland, it is also clear that particular objectives relating to cognitive and social development need to be initiated by the educators (Archer & Weir, 2004). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, effective pedagogy requires engagement by both the educator and child. Therefore, high educational standards, theoretical knowledge and professional practice are required. Equally ECEC settings must adapt to the changing social and cultural context of the families and educators must enhance their role to develop social cohesion (OECD, 2006). This all places large demands on educators. In addition, attention needs to be paid by policy makers, training institutions, and ECEC personnel to the role of the adult as educator and the content of training programmes.

In the consultation document underpinning the *Workforce Development Plan,* issues were raised by respondents in relation to new entrants to the ECEC sector (DES, 2009b). Critically, in relation to course content, there was no emphasis on pedagogy, interactions or any reference to enhancing children's thinking or language (with the exception of creating modules relating to using the Irish language with young children). The *Workforce Development Plan* builds on the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (DJELR, 2002) which sets out practitioner profiles for the childcare sector. The *Model Framework* also sets out core value statements, occupational profiles and core competencies and knowledge areas. Crucially, the occupational profiles and core competencies of the *Model Framework* (DJELR, 2002) do not highlight interactions to enhance children's thinking, scaffold children's learning and provide cognitive challenge. This is a noteworthy gap. It is anticipated that the *Model Framework* in

addition to *Aistear* and *Síolta* will inform the development of sectoral standards for all education and training awards in early childhood education and care (DES, 2009a). Since, both *Síolta* and *Aistear* highlight interactions to enhance children's learning; the importance of their implementation becomes even more significant.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 explored the conceptual understandings of the term 'educational disadvantage' in Ireland, and interrogated some understanding of deficit theories, of liberal equality theories, and of egalitarianism. A perspective on how these theories and research are reflected in linguistic theory and research was provided. ECEC policy was analysed in relation to state investment in ECEC, some specific initiatives in relation to three and four year old children living in areas designated as disadvantaged, quality assurance and standards and workforce development.

To conclude, the literature on educational inequality highlights the social advantage that the dominant class have. Social advantage is reproduced and equality of condition frustrated. The literature also highlights the significance of language, power and social reproduction. Some children living in poverty come to school with a variation of language use and are not equipped to play the rules of the education game. There have been a number of significant developments in relation to ECEC in Ireland in a relatively short time frame. In the past, the main thrust of ECEC policy in Ireland as manifested in financial investment was the provision of childcare places to support labour market participation of women. The introduction of the *Free Pre-School Year* is a landmark policy decision which privileges children's right to early education. It values ECEC as the foundation of lifelong learning and a broad preparation for life. It also

places a responsibility on policy makers to ensure that all ECEC settings are of high quality, particularly those in areas marked by poverty. Research has proven that children can make particular gains in these areas in high quality settings (Burchinal et al., 2010; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). However, the introduction of the *Free Pre-School Year* emanates from a liberal equality of opportunity perspective. As a universal provision, resources are being spread amongst many children, rather than focussing on children most at risk of educational inequality.

The *Free Pre-School Year* was presented as an example of how a programme can be "reshaped and made more effective at a lower cost to the taxpayer" (Minister for Finance, 2009, p. A.12). Reshaping ECEC policy effectively to ensure every child in Ireland has an equal chance to achieve their potential in school and to participate in society includes a radical review and public examination of the role of ECEC in Ireland and a truly integrated approach to care and education. This requires mutually respecting all our many positive differences and radical action for the transformation of negative difference such as those that result from poverty and oppression. Comprehensive and continued investment in ECEC in areas marked by poverty is essential in relation to the implementation of quality assurance and curriculum standards and workforce development. In particular, high-quality educator-child interactions must be achieved (Burchinal et al., 2010). This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 INTERACTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

The study focused on what has been identified in the literature as the key features of quality interactions between educators and children in ECEC settings in the context of pedagogical practice. In part one, this literature review articulates a theoretical perspective employed to construct a framework to inform the research analysis. Part two investigates the literature on pedagogy and pedagogical organisation. The importance of language is discussed in part three. In part four, research on educator-child interactions is highlighted. The research has a particular focus on interactions to engage children in episodes of 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002, p.10). 'Sustained shared thinking' is defined and the various concepts and theoretical underpinnings of 'shared thinking' are traced. The review then delineates interaction strategies associated with shared thinking in part five. Part six considers opportunities to enable episodes of shared thinking. The rationale for conceptualising 'sustained shared thinking' as 'extended purposive conversations' is explored in part seven. Finally, educator-child interactions are contextualised within educational inequality and ECEC policy, and a rationale for the research question and sub questions is provided.

Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning the Thesis

The perspective on the importance of educator-child interactions to enhance young children's learning is influenced by socio-cultural theory. The perspective is defined by Anning et al. (2009) as one which integrates aspects of developmental and educational psychology, sociology and anthropology, among other disciplines. The field of ECEC has been challenged by a "theoretical sea change" (Anning et al., p.1). Explanations for

early childhood development and learning were based on individuals developing in a prescribed, universal and normative pattern. These explanations have been replaced by theories that foreground the dynamic, situated and "cultural and socially constructed nature of learning" (Anning et al., p.1). Traditional theories of learning and development viewed children as consumers of the culture established by adults and as active but isolated scientists (Corsaro, 1997). In contrast, socio-cultural theory views children as active co-constructors of culture and knowledge who learn through involvement with others (Bruner & Haste, 1990).

From this perspective, teaching and learning are inextricably intertwined and are "embedded in the context of social relationships" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 8). Learning is seen as a process where children participate with increasing complexity in any given situation (Anning & Edwards, 2006). The situated and social nature of learning emphasises the importance of reciprocity between educators and young children in learning episodes. Reciprocity involves trust, empathy and mutual responsiveness and listening, sharing of ideas and alternative viewpoints (Alexander, 2003).This image of children 'developing in context' provides for a dynamic conception of learning and broadens the lens through which we observe children (Rogoff, 1990). In the context of interactions, socio-cultural theory can be employed to focus on the individual, on interpersonal interactions or on institutional (setting) factors which are relevant to particular contexts (Fleer, Anning & Cullen, 2009; Rogoff, 1990).

A socio-cultural understanding of children's learning is adopted to inform this thesis, predicated on the dynamic nature of the approach and the emphasis on children learning through interactions with others. Since children learn with the support of

others, early childhood educators are thus challenged to take a proactive role in children's learning and in their pedagogical practice in early education settings.

Pedagogy and Pedagogical Organisation

In the context of early education, a commonly used definition of pedagogy is the practice, the art, the science, or the craft of teaching (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004b; Papatheodorou, 2009). Moyles, Adams and Musgrave (2002a) represent pedagogy as a more reflective act, encompassing both the act of instruction and the ability to discuss and reflect on it. Pedagogy therefore involves "the principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape it" (Moyles et al., 2002a, p. 5). Pedagogy, in this sense, connects the role of an early childhood educator with personal, ethical, cultural and community values, the structure of the curriculum and outside influences. This definition complements a socio-cultural understanding, depicting pedagogy in the early years as operating not only from "a shared frame of reference (a mutual learning encounter) between the educator, the young child and his/her family" (Moyles et al., p.5), but also the cultural context of the educator.

There is one key element missing in the definitions above; the dialogical and relational nature of pedagogy between one human being and the other. The concept of relational pedagogy in ECEC has been explicated by Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009). Relational pedagogy focuses on the connections between people, ideas and places and the impact of these relationships on education, educators and learners. This concept draws, in part, from Freire and other progressive educators who strongly oppose education systems which focus on transmission of knowledge which is disconnected from the experiences of the learner. Freire (1972) described education as a dialogue,

which goes beyond deepening understanding between people. Such dialogue cannot take place without love for mankind and the world; "love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (Freire, pp. 77-78). True dialogue where each person has an equal voice, without domination of one over the other, is marked by humility, faith in man's abilities, hope, mutual trust and critical thinking (Freire). Relational pedagogy places communication and interactions at the core of educational practice and underpins both social and cognitive development (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

The concept of relational pedagogy resonates in Palmer's work (1998). He advocates that the ability of educators to connect with the children, and for them to connect to the curriculum, is less dependent on pedagogical methods than the degree to which the educator trusts and has an awareness of the interwoven and mutually dependant paths of the intellect, the emotions and the spirit. Palmer explains that by intellect, he means the way we think about teaching and learning. By emotion, he means the way people feel in the teaching and learning experience. Palmer interprets the spiritual dimension as the varied ways we strive for connection with others.

This approach is closer to the concept of pedagogy in early childhood that has evolved in those countries who inherited a social pedagogical tradition, such as the Nordic and Central European communities. As outlined in *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) the pedagogue embraces a holistic view of children. According to the OECD, "This is not the child only of emotions – the psycho-therapeutical approach; nor only of the body – the medical or health approach; nor only of the mind – the traditional teaching approach" (p. 59). For the pedagogue, these are inter-connected elements of each child's life, not compartments needing to be addressed separately. But this is not

simply a philosophical ideal. Bowman et al. (2001, p.58) provide research evidence from the US that early childhood programmes "must attend to cognitive, social and emotional development simultaneously" in order to have a positive impact. Children of three and four years of age will be enabled to learn more effectively if they are anchored by the emotional support, respect and acceptance of a nurturing educator (Bowman et al., 2001).

Pedagogy also relates to the dual role of educator and learner. Watkins and Mortimore (1999) cogently identified pedagogy as any activity consciously designed by one individual to contribute to learning in another. Thus, the educator is a learner and the learner is an educator. These dual roles reflect the discussion above in relation to the reciprocity of participants in learning encounters (Moyles et al., 2002a), combined with equality and mutual trust of participants (Freire, 1972). Rogoff (1998), in a discussion on adults as experts facilitating novices' learning, focuses on interactions between individuals of varying expertise. She provides a useful concept to consider the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning. She refers to expert and novice in relation "to the activity in question, not absolute designations" (Rogoff, p. 699). In the context of children's learning, children and adults therefore are not on different sides, but can collaborate in varying responsibilities and roles and become a community of learners (Rogoff).

Pedagogy defined in this way is a dynamic, interactive and collaborative process. This process should be underpinned by trust, love and care, reflection, mutual respect, and understanding. Educators and learners/experts and novices engage with each other in mutual learning encounters integrated within the socio-cultural activities of the participants. In the REPEY study (see Chapter 1) a distinction was made between two

particular aspects of pedagogy adopted by educators in early childhood settings, pedagogical framing and interactions (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Pedagogical framing (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) may be interpreted as curriculum management (Wells, 1985a) and organisation (NCCA, 2009b). Pedagogical organisation involves the creation of the conditions in which children's learning and development is enhanced. Taking a broad approach, pedagogical organisation involves the educators' own stance in relation to their role and identity as educators (as outlined above), their views of children's learning and how they should support that learning. Organising for effective pedagogy involves 'behind the scenes' work - arranging the learning environment in such a way as to promote children learning through, for example, discovery, exploration and collaboration. It also involves planning, assessing, establishing a daily routine and providing appropriate materials and other resources (Siraj-Blatchford et al.). As noted earlier, pedagogical interactions are the precise cognitive or social interactions actively undertaken by educators in face to face encounters with individual children. It is acknowledged that both pedagogical organisation *and* pedagogical interactions are required to effectively enhance children's learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al.; Wells, 1985a).

The challenge for early childhood educators is to conduct the first (pedagogical organisation) competently in order to enable the second (pedagogical interactions). Furthermore, as articulated earlier, in this model pedagogical organisation involves more than planning. It is a relational act involving the identity, the values and the theories of the educators and their views of children and early learning. Pedagogical organisation involves an ability to be responsive. It is informed by knowledge of child development and learning and the curriculum (Moyles et al., 2002a; Papatheodorou &

Moyles, 2009). Figure 5 below is a distillation of what the literature suggests is required for effective pedagogical practice in ECEC settings.

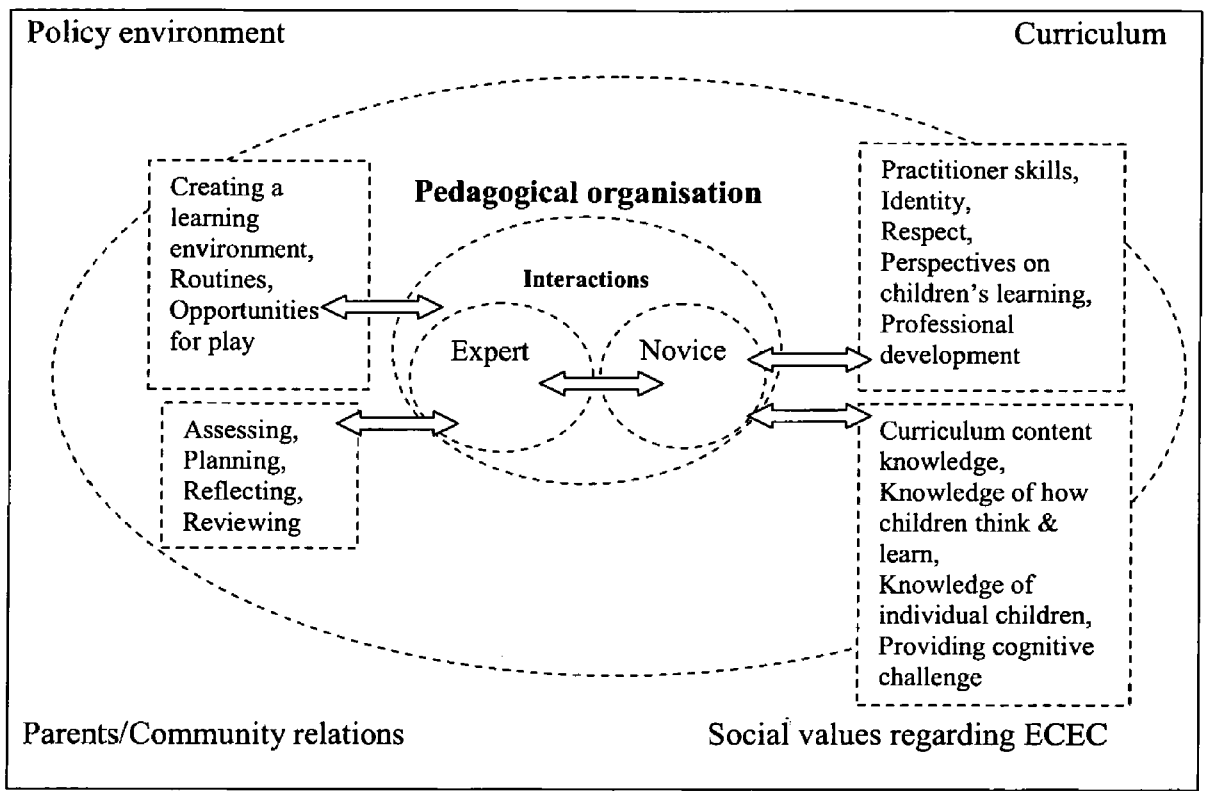

Figure 5 Model of pedagogical organisation

The literature suggests that effective pedagogy in ECEC is more than simply providing resources. It is more than knowledge of the curriculum content underpinned by theory and experience. Effective practice requires adopting strategies that enable learning to take place and it is more than the interactive process itself. It is fundamentally a human, nurturing, dialogic, reflective, respectful, responsive and collaborative act on the part of the educator encompassing principles, values and personal theories about learning. In high quality ECEC settings educators think about what has occurred in practice and why. Educators consider whether children's learning and development could be enhanced and how that is to be achieved. Reflection and planning is at the core of practice (Godhard, 1995).

The REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) and SPEEL (Moyles et al., 2002a) projects have provided a wealth of robust information on professional practice in early childhood settings. Both focus on identifying the components of effective pedagogy and reveal that a variety of effective practice exists. Both projects signalled the important role that pedagogy has to play in ECEC and the complex nature of the process. Finally, and most significantly, both projects demonstrated that educator-child interactions are foundational in enhancing children's learning and development.

The EPPE project demonstrated that "a pre-school experience can help reduce the inequality in cognitive development associated with more disadvantaged backgrounds" particularly regarding early number concepts, early literacy and language (Sammons, Elliot, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004, p. 704). That experience, however, must be of high quality. The next section explores the part played by language in learning.

The Importance of Language

There is a substantial body of literature and research on the importance for young children who may experience educational inequality to possess well-developed spoken language skills (e.g. Edwards, 1989; Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Tough, 1976; 1977; Wells & Nicholls, 1985; Wells, 1986). Language provides the most generally effective means of communication between adults and children (Tough, 1976). Until children can express their ideas, intentions and requirements through language, educators can only hypothesize what they are trying to communicate. The development of language fulfils important functions other than communication. The evidence from seminal studies suggests that there is a reciprocal correspondence between language (speech) and thought (Vygotsky, 1985).

Vygotsky (1985) views learning as a deeply social process and as such places significance on dialogue. His experiments demonstrated two important points. In solving problems children's action and their speech are part of the one complex psychological function. Secondly, the more complex the problem to be solved and the less direct the solution, the greater the role that speech plays. Vygotsky suggested that through cultural tools such as language (in addition to numbering, algebraic signs, writing and drawings) children master their own mental processes just as technical tools help to master the work process. Higher mental functions (such as perception and thinking) are mediated via children's use of the cultural tools. These cultural tools are incorporated in storytelling, literature, art, play and dialogue. Vygotsky placed language and communication at the heart of personal and intellectual development: "thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (Vygotsky p. 125). In this dynamic interplay as children learn to use words, so also they learn concepts. It is logical then that the ability of children to engage with the school curriculum is in part related to their ability to use language. Chapter 2 discussed the importance of language in later school success in the context of educational inequality.

Dockrell and Lindsay (2001) highlight the challenges that young children have as a consequence of having language difficulties. These challenges are compounded for those children for whom English is a second language. Children may experience problems in general communication and social skills, in accessing the curriculum particularly on language-related tasks, in approaches to learning and attention span. There is also evidence that written language development draws on oral competence (Riley et al., 2004). Oral language is the foundation for literacy development. Reading ability is dependent on grammatical and semantic language competence. Riley et al.

(2004, p. 659) report "that children with poor skills of language processing are weak at the literal and inferential comprehension of texts".

The research addressed above points to the critical importance of ECEC. Early childhood settings have a significant role in providing the kinds of language experiences that will support children to engage with and make the kinds of meanings that are expected at school. These kinds of language experiences can be acquired through interactions between educators and children. It is on this basis that attention is now turned to interactions.

Interactions

Children learn as social beings through interactions (Bruner & Haste, 1990). In the REPEY study, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) systematically observed and analysed educators' interactions and presented them within two categories: mainly cognitive interactions and mainly social interactions, as illustrated in Figure 6.

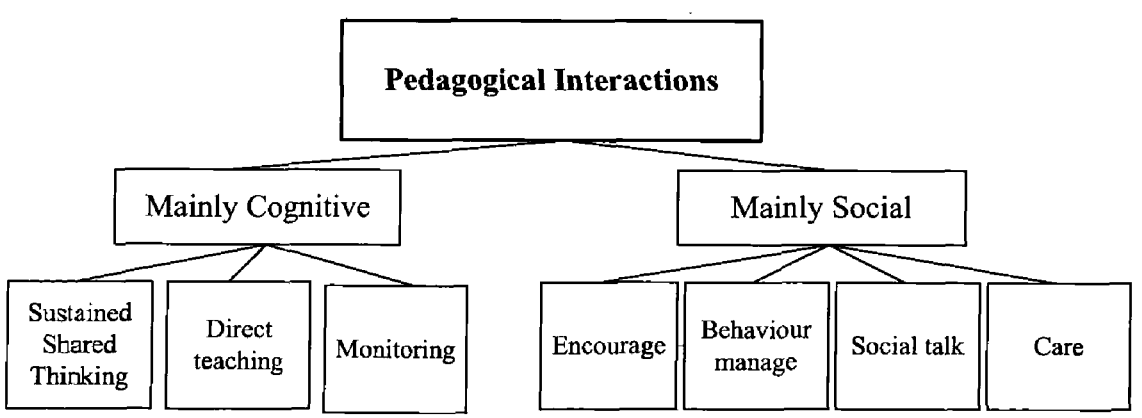

Figure 6 Interactions (across all settings and curricular areas)

Source: Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.50

Effective settings valued social interaction and cognitive learning equally (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The focus on both social and cognitive interactions is warranted

as it is now accepted that cognition develops in a social context (Schaffer, 1996). However, consistent with the theories of Vygotsky and Rogoff, Alexander (2003) advises educators not to polarise the cognitive and social purposes of learning interactions. His caution is that children need to feel socially at ease and free to interact before participating in cognitively challenging interactions and secondly, learning is "fundamentally a social process" (Alexander, 2003, p. 31). Furthermore, a consistent finding in literature is that a positive approach and emotional warmth on the part of the educator encourages constructive actions in children (Bowman et al., 2001). Moyles et al. (2002a) do not differentiate interactions into either social or cognitive interactions. Within the theme of practice, they consider the focus, context, purpose and content of educators' interactions with children. Through the analysis of video-stimulated reflective dialogues, Moyles et al. (2002a) provide insight into practitioners understanding and knowledge of effective practice mediated through their interactions. The paucity of Irish research on interactions for three and four year olds in general in all ECEC settings (outside of primary schools) was outlined in Chapter 1. The relevant international research literature on interactions is now considered.

Lessons from Research on Interactions

A key finding of the REPEY project was that the most effective settings, in terms of social, intellectual and dispositional outcomes for children, were characterised by adults and children engaging in episodes of 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004b). This research demonstrated that episodes of 'sustained shared thinking' may be especially important in terms of supporting and extending children's learning. The research revealed that such episodes,

although infrequently observed, were "a necessary pre-requisite for the most effective early years settings" (Siraj-Blatchford et al., p.11).

Sustained shared thinking in the context of the REPEY project was defined as an "episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend" (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.8). Shared thinking is not a new concept; it has long been identified as significant to cognitive development in young children (Bruner, 1996, Goncu & Rogoff, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Wells, 1985a). It is proposed that the concept of 'shared thinking' from a socio-cultural perspective may involve more than 'individuals working together' in an intellectual way and that as a concept it could be extended. It is a creation of joint understandings between partners, built on common ground, but acknowledging that each person works from a unique perspective. Some adjustments are necessary in each perspective to truly understand the other. It is those adjustments that are the basis for development (Rogoff).

Furthermore, it is proposed that educators must be proactive in engaging children in shared thinking and must establish and maintain children's attention (Tayler, 2001). The literature highlights the relationship between sustained shared thinking and positive outcomes for children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Tayler, 2001). Interaction strategies that engage children in episodes of shared thinking and facilitate and direct thinking include scaffolding, discussion, questioning, modelling and playing within a shared activity (Siraj-Blatchford et al.).

Underpinning Concepts of Sustained Shared Thinking

Engaging children in episodes of shared thinking is underpinned by ideas of guided participation, intersubjectivity, co-construction and meaning making, interactional/transactional process, and collaboration, among others. These terms will be defined before proceeding further, although each is dependent on the other, and some interpretations overlap.

Rogoff (1990, p.8) has introduced the concept of *guided participation* to suggest that both participation and guidance "in culturally valued activities is essential to a child's apprenticeship in thinking". Guidance may be explicit or tacit and involves children and companions in collaborative processes of building bridges from their current skills and understandings to acquire new skills and understanding. Guided participation also involves structuring and arranging for children's participation, with dynamic shifts in children's developing responsibilities as they participate in higher levels of cognition (Rogoff). It is not intended to inform a particular instructional technique, but is a "perspective for examining people's opportunities to learn through diverse processes of participation" in various activities (Rogoff, 1998, p. 700).

Underpinning the processes of guided participation is the concept of *intersubjectivity* (Rogoff 1998; Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). This concept stems from European studies of the phenomenology of language, which underscore the importance of mutual understanding between people engaged in dialogue. Trevarthen (1980) is credited with introducing the term to developmental psychology, in particular in the context of interpersonal communication between infants and their mothers (Schaffer, 2006; Stremmel & Fu, 1993). It is an extension of the term subjectivity which implies

awareness of oneself as a sentient, cognisant being. Subjectivity occurs within individuals, intersubjectivity occurs between people. From a socio-cultural perspective, Trevarthen (1998) argues that intersubjectivity is the motivation, medium and outcome of learning. It is a continual process of meaning making; the construction and reconstruction of joint purposes between a child as innate companion and co-participant. This mutual understanding between people is an integrating dynamic process based on a "common focus of attention and some shared presuppositions that form the ground for communication" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 71). Schaffer (2006, p. 155) puts it in colloquial terms when he describes achieving intersubjectivity as being "on the same wavelength". Meanings are negotiated, not transmitted or imposed on passive recipients. There is a mutual engagement with the understandings and feelings of the other.

Children learn actively through exploration of the physical world. As they interact with the concrete world and make sense of it, they construct their own meaning, personal knowledge and understanding. Social constructivists develop Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and believe that it is principally through negotiating meaning in social interaction with others that children learn (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Socio-cultural theorists extend that concept to include that knowledge is also culturally constructed. Knowledge, which is culturally constructed, is acquired through active engagement with people, ideas and materials in their socio-cultural context. *Co-construction* and *meaning-making* involve adults becoming aware of children's knowledge and understanding and engaging with that; developing excellent dialogue skills and interest and enthusiasm to discover more about the child's topic of interest. Echoing Rogoff's (1998) concepts of expert and novice, children's knowledge is acknowledged as expert and as valid as the adults (Jordan, 2009). Jacoby and Ochs (1995, p.171) refer to co-construction as "the joint creation of a

form, interpretation ... emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality". The focus is on developing intersubjectivity, rather than achieving a specific learning outcome or direction which may exist in the mind of an educator (Jordon). The co- prefix covers a range of interactional/transactional processes, including coordination, collaboration and cooperation. However, co-construction is not exclusive to positive interactions. Arguments can also be co-constructed (Jacoby and Ochs). Cognition is not seen as separate from social, emotional, motivational and identity processes, but is seen as a complex and integrated within interactions. Cognition therefore happens within a collaborative process (Rogoff).

Having outlined the underpinning concepts of guided participation, intersubjectivity, co-construction, and meaning making, the following section traces the origins of the concept of shared thinking and its importance in influencing learning and development as depicted in the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Enabling shared thinking between educators and children is now considered in the context of interaction strategies.

Interaction Strategies

As discussed, a socio-cultural perspective on ECEC considers children as social beings, learning through interactions in activities, in the context of reciprocal relationships. This section incorporates the particular interaction strategies that the literature suggests enhances children's learning. These strategies include establishing a supportive interpersonal environment, active listening, scaffolding, discussing/questioning, and modelling. The first strategy is now explored.

Establishing a Supportive Interpersonal Environment

As discussed earlier, the literature is clear on the importance of children building positive relationships with an emotionally and physically present adult available in their social context (Bowman et al., 2001). Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 60) describes how children's learning and development is enhanced by their engagement "in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment". David, Goouch, Powell, and Abbot (2002, p. 19) concur and provide evidence that in order to become a 'strong child', children have a need for "recognition, acceptance and comfort, and being able to contribute to secure attachments; being special to someone and exploring emotional boundaries". Children in secure relationships with adults are more likely to explore their environment - thereby enhancing their learning and development. Furthermore, children are more likely to be more sociable and interact better with peers have verbal acuity, and perform better at cognitive tasks (Hart & Risley, 1995; Lobman, 2006).

Conversely, adults who are not responsive to children and who may locate themselves nearby but not engage in children's play, fail to optimise children's learning. In that situation, children's social interactions and cognitive activities are less complex (Lobman). In the REPEY project where educators demonstrated warmth and were particularly responsive to the individual needs of children, children showed better social behavioural outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Learning is seen as a reciprocal and collaborative process between the adult and child (Dewey, 1966; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This involves active listening and

reflection in order to create a 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2005) and a 'pedagogy of relationships' (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Active Listening

Seminal studies of interactions between educators and children in institutional contexts, schools and early childhood settings, have revealed that educators spent significantly more time talking to, rather than listening to, children (Flanders, 1970; Wells, 1982; Tizard & Hughes, 2002). One study reported that many educators are poor listeners who remain distracted, pre-occupied and forgetful seventy five per cent of the time (Renck Jalongo, 1995, cited in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). This is in contrast to findings from studies in the home (cited in Wells, 1985a), which suggest that linguistic progress is attributable to: (1) responsive sensitivity and acceptance of young children's utterances, combined with non-directive interaction from the mothers (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1974), and (2) the frequency with which adults intentionally aim to understand children's meaning and expand and extend it (Barnes, Gutfreund, Satterly & Wells, 1983). Listening is both an active and a reciprocal verb (Rinaldi, 2006). This suggests that educators need sensitivity to the children's current state, a desire to interpret their meaning, and for them to participate in the interaction. In other words educators need to actively listen. These are the characteristics of conversations (at any age) where there is a genuine desire to achieve mutual understanding (Wells, 1985a). Wells emphasises that such characteristics are particularly important when interacting with a less experienced conversationalist. Otherwise children's learning becomes dominated by educators' directions, thoughts and expectations. Children do not have opportunities then, to direct their own learning (Wells). Through active listening, valuable insights into how children may be feeling

and their general development may be gained (Epstein, 2007a). What children say warrants respect, and authentic acceptance of their diverse family activities, lifestyles and choices, from an educator without ridicule or mock surprise (MacNaughton & Williams). Children's stories and home lives can be a rich source of interaction. Such events can be utilised to enable episodes of shared thinking between educators and children.

Scaffolding

The metaphor *scaffolding* was coined by Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976) to describe the process by which adults or capable peers support and guide children's learning. A significant proportion of children's everyday activities take place in what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Rogoff (1998) highlights that the idea of scaffolding is often considered in the same breath as the ZPD, whereas they are two distinct concepts. The ZPD defines the range within which a person with more expertise assists another person to work at a higher level of competence than they could achieve on their own. Vygotsky (p. 86) states that the ZPD is "the distance between the [child's] actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the [child's] level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Vygotsky explains that through social interaction with more expert companions, the child is able to model a variant of action "which goes beyond the border of its own capacity" (p. 88). This suggests that instruction can only be effective if it is one step ahead of children's development.

A range of learning experiences and tasks involved in scaffolding has been identified. These include the need for adults to stimulate interest in the task; to simplify the task yet provide intellectual challenge; to provide time to afford necessary support and maintain the pursuit of the goal within the ZPD (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Educators decide when children are ready to move from one level of development to another, and reduce their input as the child progresses. Thus, the key challenge for adults is to have sufficient knowledge of children's current level of development, which then becomes the challenge of defining the limits of the zone, and matching or tuning the adult support to a point beyond the child's current capabilities. Furthermore the literature advises that educators have knowledge of general teaching techniques, control frustration and risk and encourage self-regulation (Berk & Winsler; Rogoff, 1998; CECDE, 2006b; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004).

Berk and Winsler (1995) suggest that scaffolding also requires engagement in authentic joint problem-solving and intersubjectivity in culturally meaningful activities. This presents scaffolding as a flexible structure of support and highlights the significance of discussion.

Discussing/Questioning

The term *discussing* refers to a prolonged conversation with a child about a particular topic (Fisher, 2001). More than a succession of questions from adult to child, discussion allows for an exchange of ideas with a view to reaching understanding, solving problems, or sharing information. Educators and children in a discussion must be prepared to speak, listen, respond, put forward more than one point of view, and intend to develop their knowledge (Fisher). Creating a discussion requires of the

educator to take on the various roles of expert, facilitator and participant and, as referred to earlier, creator of meaningful contexts for discussion and enquiry. In the case of young children the topics for discussion could stem from children's own interests, their current activities or importantly from their questions, leading to opportunities for shared thinking.

From the perspective of educators the importance of *questioning* and attention to children's responses, have long been identified (Alexander, 2008; Fisher, 2001; Hohmann & Weikart, 1995; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). It should be noted that some educators' questioning styles may impede rather than stimulate conversation (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). Fisher (2001) cited a study (Wood & Wood, 1983) where it was found that the more educators asked questions the less likely they were to receive questions, promote elaborate responses and encourage spontaneous contributions in dialogue from children. Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni analysed and categorised the range of questions asked by educators in the REPEY study which pointed to the preponderance of closed-ended questions. The style of questioning is therefore important. Closed-ended questions did not contribute to extending children's thinking in conversations (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni).

Alexander (2003) illustrates that a distinguishing feature of discussion is the act of questioning. The answer is not the end point of the learning exchange "but its true centre of gravity" and it should give rise to a new question (p. 33). Alexander advises that if educators want young people to talk in order to learn (and learn to talk); what children say is more important than what the educator says. In his study there were clear differences in those questions and responses which were channelled into cognitively

challenging and meaningful sequences and those hampered by rote repetitive initiation-response interactions. Talk was further hampered by the vagueness of quasi-conversation or by sacrificing cumulation (building the conversation) and continuity due to an emphasis on equal participation (Alexander, 2008).

Cognitively challenging questions are designed to develop children's thinking and responses beyond the immediate to reflect and talk about what they have done, are doing, and plan to do (Massey, 2004). The degree of cognitive challenge can range from low, labelling objects, yes/no responses, locating objects; to medium, describing, recalling, prompting, elaborating; to high, problem-solving, comparing, predicting, evaluating (Durden & Dangel, 2008; Massey). Open-ended questions assume the potential variety of responses without having to deduce a right or wrong answer. They support the sharing of theories and understandings, feelings and imaginings and provoke thought. Closed questions are used to recall facts. Children learn quickly to ignore questions that require 'yes' 'no' responses (Hohmann et al., 2008; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). In the REPEY project the evidence suggests that open-ended questioning is coupled with better cognitive attainment. However, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p. 11) reported that "open-ended questions made up only 5.1% of the questioning used in the 14 case study settings". Learning to use questioning effectively is therefore a challenge but critically important for early childhood educators.

Modelling

According to Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p. 144) *modelling* includes "the demonstration of activities accompanied by the child's attention and interest as well as a verbal commentary from the adult". In contrast, MacNaughton and Williams (2004)

separate modelling and demonstration into two distinctive techniques. Modelling is described as a process by which children learn behaviours by simply copying others. Demonstration supports children's learning by showing children how to use special tools or materials or "how to accomplish a particular task" (MacNaughton & Williams, p. 55). Wells (1982) noted that parents rarely engaged in direct teaching. However, their influence could be seen in the modelling of mature behaviours, taking conversational turns, negotiating meaning, and sustaining interest (Wells). Modelling, according to Bruner (1996) is the basis of apprenticeship. It is an imitative process by which a novice is led into the skilled ways by an expert. However, research demonstrates that to get to deeper level of flexible skill there needs to be a combination of conceptual explanation combined with practice (Bowman et al., 2001).

Fisher (2001) referred to modelling as recreating the world as we understand it in words, to talk to ourselves about our experiences. Through that process, the talking itself can give substance to our thinking. Therefore children should be encouraged to articulate their thinking through dialogue. This means children thinking about their own learning, remembering, evaluating their work and the usefulness of their current strategies (Bruner, 1996). The literature on the opportunities available to establish a 'shared world' and enable episodes of shared thinking is now examined.

Opportunities to Enable Episodes of Shared Thinking

In order to develop intersubjectivity there must be a shared focus of attention (Rogoff, 1990). Schaffer (1996) focussed on the kinds of interactions, or 'joint involvement episodes', that appeared to him to play a particularly significant role in progressing development. According to Schaffer, "Joint involvement episodes refers to

any encounter between two individuals in which the participants pay joint attention to, and jointly act upon, some external topic" (p. 253). Within the shared frame of reference adult activity takes mostly two forms: supportive and challenging. The former serves to maintain the child's current focus of attention. Behaviours include holding objects, arranging objects in order for easier access, or verbally labelling events. The latter takes a more proactive form especially in problem-solving situations where the child has to be assisted to reach a goal. Schaffer maintains that children's behaviour is richer and more complex during episodes of joint involvement than at other times. This suggests, as proposed by Vygotsky, that such episodes "can elicit optimal and most advanced performances in children" (p. 254). Therefore an ability to organise children's attention in joint involvement episodes would appear to be an essential component in educators' behaviour and "the onus is on the adult to promote sharing of a topic" (p. 264).

In the REPEY study the term 'joint involvement episode' is accredited to Bruner (1996) and appears to be seen as synonymous with sustained shared thinking. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p.10) noted "our research has also shown that adult-child interactions that involve some element of 'sustained shared thinking' or what Bruner has termed 'joint involvement episodes' may be especially valuable in relation to children's learning". However, joint involvement is but one element of shared thinking. Drawing on the literature above (Schaffer, 1996), it is proposed that, rather than the terms being synonymous, that there is a continuum from 'joint attention' through to 'joint involvement' to 'sustained shared thinking'. A pre-requisite for 'sustained shared thinking' to occur between adults and young children is to engage children in joint activity (Smith, 1999).

In the REPEY study, sustained shared thinking was most likely to occur when children were interacting one-to-one with a single peer partner or with an adult (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). It was also suggested that the best opportunities for educators to extend children's thinking were in freely chosen play activities (Siraj-Blatchford et al.). Furthermore, a balance between child-led and adult-led interactions and between an open-framework approach, where children have free choice in instructive environments, and more focused group work with direct instruction was in evidence in the most effective settings (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2005). When children use their initiative in child-led activities they are motivated to begin and follow through on any given task (Epstein, 2007a). When supported to follow their own interests, children's engagement is confident and purposeful (Hohman et al., 2008). It is logical, therefore, that children engage in conversations that they initiate themselves and that are grounded in their own interests. They become active agents in the conversation and of their own learning rather than passive recipients of educator-directed learning (Hohmann et al.). The onus is on the educator to ascertain children's interests, to design experiences which capitalise on those interests and to exploit opportunities that arise to engage in conversation with the children.

Collaboration about what Matters to Children

There has been a convergence of research, dating back to the 1937 work of Bos (as cited in Goncu & Rogoff, 1998), on "the importance of social interaction in cognitive development" which has highlighted the significance of shared thinking between expert and novice (Goncu & Rogoff, p. 334). One such seminal research project, the Bristol Study, charted the development of young children's acquisition of English (Wells, 1985a). The successful contributions of adults (parents and educators)

in shared interactions with young children were identified (Wells, 1985a). These contributions included having a shared focus of attention, an attitude of reciprocity, and both adults and children participating as equal conversational partners with adults striving to support and extend children's utterances. In the same study Wells spoke of 'sustaining strategies' and 'sustained episodes'. Adults (parents), by using rising tones and engagement in the conversation, conveyed the clear message that they are listening, engrossed in what is being said and would like to hear more. Wells refers to how in the pre-school years conversation is most effective, in enhancing children's development of language, "when it is collaborative, when it is a joint construction" (p. 15).

Wells (1985a) proposes that episodes like this are more likely to be sustained as there is an increased likelihood that both partners will correctly interpret what each other is saying and therefore collaboratively establish a shared construction of meaning about the topic. In reference to three and four year olds, Tizard & Hughes (2002, p. 63) also point to the fundamental significance of creating a common referent between adults and children, in their words "a shared world of common experience to act as a backcloth to their conversation". In their analysis there is a lack of shared experience in ECEC which creates a barrier between educators and children. Creating opportunities to establish a 'shared world' would appear to be an important first step in this process.

Criteria for the Implementation of Effective Experiences

Young children need planned opportunities for learning in group experiences, co-operative ventures and sustained projects (Wood, 1998). Wood suggests that the success of planned group experiences is directly related to adults' ability to assess children's current level of task-specific knowledge and conceptual understanding and to present

tasks accordingly. He proposes that, "Where the gap between children's current level of understanding and that demanded by what is being taught is too great, then we cannot expect to find the child concentrating on what is being done or said" (p. 283). There may be many factors which contribute to the success of a chosen task, some related to child factors. Some children may be temperamentally unsuited to attending, concentrating or sitting still; some may be affected by impaired biological processes; and some may experience poor diet and or stress (Wood).

Adult-related factors can also be significant in the success of group experiences. The experience may be presented in an uninteresting or illogical way. The adult may have unrealistic expectations regarding a child's ability, or indeed the learning experiences provided may be of little interest to the child. Identifying the task at hand, breaking it down into small steps, and sequencing the task to match the developmental stage of the child is recommended (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004).

The experience itself may be "conceptually and emotionally 'impoverished'" contributing little to cognitively or emotionally engage children or their acts of sense making (Adams, Alexander, Drummond & Moyles 2004, p. 22). What children learn should be relevant and engaging, and children should be offered first-hand experiences through experimentation and discovery about the real world (Adams et al., 2004). First-hand experiences are defined as "using real things for real purposes" (Rich et al., 2005, p. 18). Such experiences include manipulating and using real things, meeting others and going to places, being "out and about" (Rich et al., p. 18). Not only must educators create common experiences of interest to children, they must continually monitor the child's attentional behaviour. Monitoring attentional behaviour ensures that children stay within the experience/topic and also enables children to link past and future events

critical to cognitive development (Rogoff, 1990). It is advised that educators undertake a critical enquiry of the quality of the experiences they construct for children using the criteria of cognitive challenge (Adams et al., 2004). Furthermore, institutional, team, and individual planning and organisation are necessary to ensure the implementation of effective experiences designed to enhance children's learning (Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann & Weikart, 1995). Small group work provides significant opportunities for educators to plan engaging experiences with a focus on encouraging thinking and language through conversation.

The literature is convincing on the argument that episodes of sustained shared thinking can be a significant factor in enhancing children's learning and development (Smith, 1999; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). From what has been portrayed in this literature review, enabling episodes of sustained shared thinking requires educators to be proactive and use a number of devices to create a common knowledge between educators and children, thereby creating rich opportunities to extend children's language and thinking. This could include gathering information about children's interests or happenings in the home, creating exciting experiences and mutual endeavours. In planned experiences it also involves adjusting and tuning-in to children's perspectives, sharing control and supporting children to exert their agency. Research reveals that there is no one ideal strategy to enhance children's learning and development and that many strategies may be employed successfully (Bowman et al., 2001).

The literature has highlighted that engaging children in 'sustained shared thinking' leads to high cognitive outcomes for the children (Schaffer, 1996; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). How 'sustained shared thinking' is conceptualised in the context of this research, and why the author of this study coined the term 'extended purposive conversations' from this point forward is now considered.

Towards Extended Purposive Conversations

It could be argued that to coin a new term is unnecessary, particularly as it is considered that both the terms 'sustained shared thinking' and 'extended purposive conversations' are underpinned by the same concepts of guided participation, intersubjectivity, and co-construction. However, it is proposed that the difference is the focus on conversation in scheduled SGLEs with three and four year old children. The main purpose is to extend the conversation by listening to and engaging children with conscious purpose and intent, encouraging them to articulate their discoveries and their learning throughout scheduled group experiences. The intention is to interact with children in order to enhance their development and learning (Epstein, 2007a).

'Extended purposive conversations' (EPCs) is a useful term to help communicate to educators and students, who are working with three and four year old children, that purposefully aiming towards lengthening the amount of engagement in talk is important and requires thoughtfulness and planning. Alexander (2008, p. 92) refers to "an emerging pedagogy of the spoken word"; the term 'extended purposive conversations' suggests that a pedagogy of conversation could emerge. Such a pedagogy utilises the power of conversation to engage children's learning and thinking and secure their understanding (Alexander). It is suggested that the term could support the application of the theory in practice.

The emphasis on 'conversation' is perhaps more concrete, grounded in practice, and easier than 'thinking' for educators to conceptualise as a goal for working with young children. However, in this study, the term 'conversation' is not used in the meaning of the forms of talk identified by Fisher (2007, p. 618) where he said that

conversation was "talk with others characterised by uncritical sharing, lacking depth and challenge, speaking and listening at a low level of cognitive demand". Instead Wells' view of conversation is employed where he indicated that "the most important feature of a child's language experience is that it is conversational in nature" (Wells, 1985a, p. 1). An ideal conversation is one where adults engage in reciprocity and treat children as equal conversational partners. Such adult conversational partners believe that children have worthwhile things to say, and support a child's "attempts to communicate and extend his or her contributions" (Wells, p. 7). As stated in Chapter 1, EPCs are dynamic, collaborative, reciprocal and dialogic exchanges characterised by interaction strategies deliberately exploited by educators to enhance cognitive, social and linguistic skills in young children. Figure 7 illustrates a possible conceptual framework of the components of EPCs.

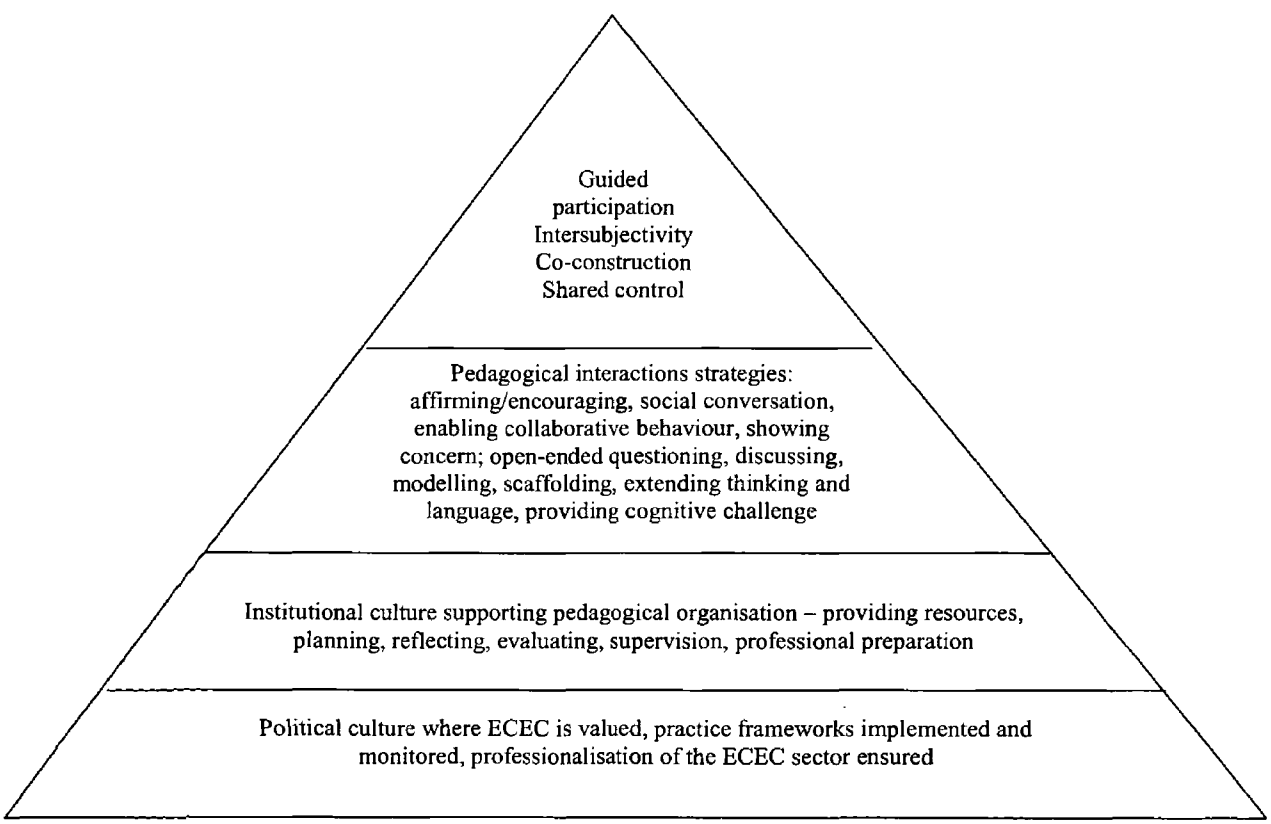

Figure 7 Building blocks of extended purposive conversations

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has addressed interactions in the context of pedagogical practice. The theoretical perspective of socio-cultural theory has been stated. The importance of language, some interaction strategies and opportunities to enable episodes of shared thinking were outlined. Finally, a rationale for substituting the term 'sustained shared thinking' for the term 'extended purposive conversations' was provided. EPCs can be clearly identified in the literature as an educational dimension to aspire to in ECEC facilities. The literature suggests that interaction strategies that engage children in EPCs are especially effective in enhancing children's educational outcomes.

As stated by the National Forum Secretariat in 1998, the question is no longer whether or not ECEC is effective in alleviating educational inequality but rather *how* and *why* children achieve particular gains within particular settings. The rigorous research of the REPEY project provides some answers to those questions, particularly *how* (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Pedagogical organisation to establish a supportive learning environment combined with active listening, discussion, modelling, scaffolding and opportunities to enable episodes of EPCs provide the best outcomes for children at risk of educational under achievement in terms of their development.

What is not known, in Ireland in ECEC settings (particularly those outside of the education sector), is the nature of the educator-child interactions that children are experiencing. It is against such a backdrop that this study of aspects of pedagogy, in particular interactions, in ECEC settings in areas designated as disadvantaged was undertaken. The study focuses on three and four year old children as these children experience a wider range of publically-funded provision than other age groups (McGough et al., 2006). These children are also the focus of ECEC policy. This means

that the remit of this study does not extend to private provision, children in services up to the age of three and the junior infant class of primary school.

It is a challenge for researchers to attend to both the learning of children and to the contributions of their companions and their community (Rogoff, 1998). For researchers working from a socio-cultural perspective the challenge is to develop "methods to examine individual contributions in the course of their participation in socio-cultural activity, not to treat the individual's contributions as existing separately from the dynamic interpersonal and socio-cultural aspects of the activity" (Rogoff, p.692). In order to focus the question and adopt a socio-cultural perspective, it is therefore important to choose a unit of activity as the basic unit of analysis. In this study, the unit of activity consists of small group experiences common to the three settings. Arising from the literature reviews the research question is stated as follows: What is the nature of the pedagogy, in particular the interactions occurring in scheduled small group experiences between early childhood educators and three and four year old children, attending three selected ECEC settings in urban areas designated as disadvantaged? The sub questions are further broken down in Chapter 1 (see p.9).

Rogoff (1998, p. 688) has developed the idea that the "examination of individual and interpersonal and community/institutional developmental processes involves differing planes of observation and analysis". Drawing from Vygotsky's work, these 'three planes of analysis' do not include boundaries between separate entities. The focus may be on one plane, for example the contributions of one child (personal) at a worktable in a classroom with an adult and peer, while the other planes, the contributions of the adult and second child (interpersonal) and the classroom setting (community/institutional), are blurred (Rogoff). Lenses continually move back and forth

from the intra-personal/personal to the interpersonal to the cultural/institutional (Rogoff, 2003). The policy and educational inequality context also has a bearing on interactions resulting in the extension of a fourth plane of analysis named societal.

Figure 8 presents a model which summarises both literature reviews contained within Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 on the context of educational inequality, the policy perspective and the influences on the nature of pedagogy in SGLEs. Rogoff's terms of expert and novice, instead of educator and children, are adopted (Rogoff, 1998).

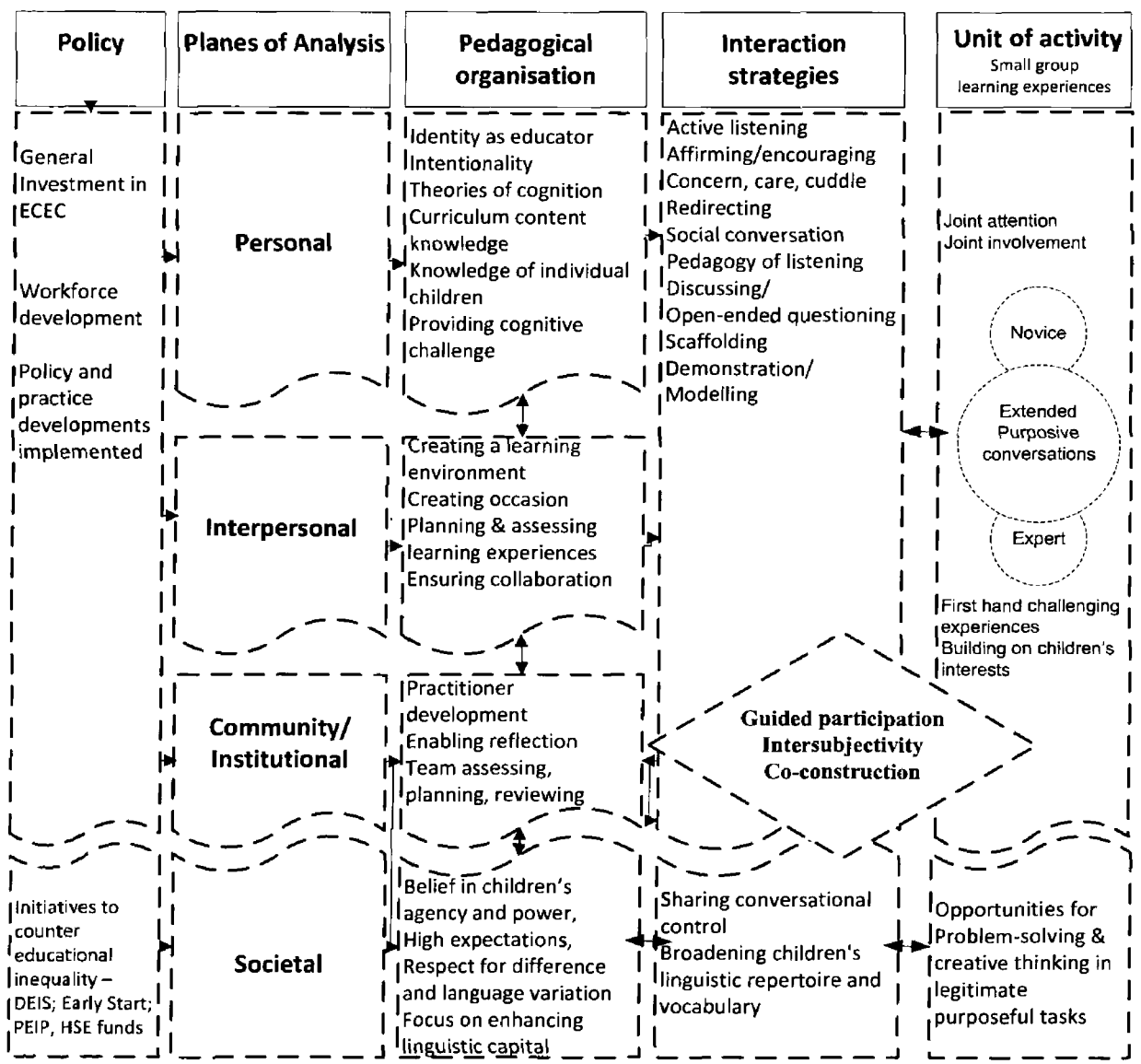

Figure 8 The influences on the nature of the interactions in SGLEs in the context of educational inequality

The focus is of this research is on the dynamic process elements of practice as opposed to the structural or procedural (Anning et al., 2009). The research aims to give an authentic picture of practice across the three settings in relation to interactions between educators and children. Chapter 4 now presents the methods used to meet this aim.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4 sets out the research design and the process of data collection for this study in six parts. The first part explores the design of the study and the rationale for case study as the chosen methodology. The second part outlines the criteria for the selection of the settings and the research participants. This is followed by the ethical considerations in part three. The fourth part profiles the duration of time spent in the settings and the sources and range of data collected. In the fifth part the preparation of the data for analysis is explained in addition to the coding schedules for selected elements of the data. The limitations of the case study approach are outlined in the sixth part along with how those limitations were addressed.

This study aims to generate a picture of practice in relation to the nature of the pedagogy, in particular the interactions between three educators and three to four year old children in SGLEs in three selected early education and care settings. The research therefore seeks to capture the dynamic character of these interactions, and uncover potential patterns and trends (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). The objectives of the study are charted in Chapter 1 of this thesis (see p.8). The section below presents the research design incorporating the chosen research paradigm, the research strategy, the pilot study and the data collection instruments.

Research Design

Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is a way to 'see' the topic of study and organise the findings into a coherent whole (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Hughes, 2001; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maykut and Moorhouse, 1994). The paradigm influences the choice of method of investigation. It is generally argued (e.g. Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000)

that the role of theory and the sequence and significance of the research procedures involved centre around two main traditions - the positivist (quantitative, experimental) and the interpretive (qualitative, ethnographic). A third paradigm, theoretically related to pragmatism (pluralism), is referred to as a 'mixed methods' approach or model (e.g. Denscombe, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As O'Leary (2005, p. 1) explains the two main paradigms of research are used within the framework of disciplined inquiry: "While they may differ in terms of philosophy and methodology, they share the goal of solving problems and answering questions in some systematic, disciplined way". Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches are often used in the design of modern research in early childhood education (e.g. Aubrey et al., 2000).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identify the strength of qualitative methods. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers are interested with the research participant's point of view. However, qualitative researchers believe they can access the research participant's perspective by means of detailed observation and interviewing. Qualitative researchers argue that "quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subject's perspective because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 10). This study focuses on the nature of interactions in a naturalistic setting, that is, as the educators and children go about their typical activities in ECEC settings in areas designated as disadvantaged. In order to explore the issue it was deemed worthwhile to observe directly the interactions, interview the educators and engage in film-stimulated reflective dialogues with them to ascertain and understand their perspectives. With its combination of interview and observation, the study falls within a qualitative paradigm.

Features of qualitative research include: transparency regarding the researcher's personal and theoretical position (see Chapters 1 and 2), an ethical concern for those being studied, and an attempt to disclose the richness of the data (Edwards, 2001). Vigilant systems of data collection are required to enable rigorous analysis. Finally, a daily research diary was kept to enable a critical reflection on that day's events throughout the data gathering process (Edwards, 2001). The researcher aimed to comply with the above characteristics of qualitative research. The next section discusses the choice of research strategy.

Research Strategy

Aubrey et al. (2000, p. 5) note that, for research to be taken seriously, "the researcher should know why certain methods and procedures have been selected as fittest for the purpose and an awareness of the limitations should be acknowledged". This study uses a case study research strategy. Such a strategy attempts "to answer the question 'What is going on here?' by focussing on the particularities of lives in context" (Edwards, 2001, p. 126). A case study research strategy seeks to ascertain the meanings that individuals bring to their actions and to report on the complexity of social activity (Stark and Torrance, 2004). Case study research has been informed by many theoretical perspectives drawing from a broad range of studies including social science, medicine, special education and law (Stake, 1995). Stark and Torrance (2004) identified that case study can be seen as an approach to research rather than a coherent and singular form of research, hence the term strategy.

The use of a case study strategy fits within a social-cultural theoretical perspective. From this perspective, "case study assumes that 'social reality' is created

through social interactions, albeit situated in particular contexts and histories, and seeks to identify and describe before trying to analyse and theorize" (Stark & Torrance, 2004, p. 33). Case study involves fieldwork which emphasises observing research participants as they engage in their every day actions, complemented by interview to ascertain the participant's view point (Stark & Torrance, 2004). Case studies are best employed to address explanatory or descriptive questions which strive to develop a "firsthand understanding of people and events" (Yin, 2006, p.112).

A case study research strategy was adopted for four reasons. First, because of its potential to focus on one bounded instance of the object of investigation, greater depth and intensity can be acquired than through a survey or experimentation approach (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006). The interactions studied were bounded, as only those examined in great detail were scheduled SGLEs. Second, processes underpinning the interactions and relationships between educators and children were examined rather than the outcomes of these. Third, multiple sources of data were used at the time of analysis to facilitate triangulation (see below Data Collection Instruments). Finally, it was necessary to examine the interactions in their natural setting, and not impose change, interfere with the interactions or try to control the situation (see also Observer Effects). All of these reasons support the adoption of a case study approach (e.g. Denscombe, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Robson, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006).

However, there were limitations to such an approach. The limitations relate to contaminating observer effects, potential observer bias, the time-consuming nature of observation and transcription, the lack of generalisability, issues of trustworthiness and challenges in defining the boundaries of the case (Cohen, et al., 2007; Denscombe, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2006; Stark and Torrance, 2004; Yin, 2003).

All of these issues and how they were dealt with will be addressed in the final section of this chapter (see Limitations of the Study, p. 109), but first the pilot study and the tools used to gather the data are outlined.

The Pilot Study and the Data Collection Instruments

A pilot study was conducted to establish the feasibility of the research design and to identify potential challenges in the collection and analysis of data (see Appendix 3 Pilot Study Report). The pilot study provided the opportunity to learn 'on the job' as suggested by Robson (2002), and to refine the plan regarding the data collection and the protocols to be followed. The pilot study was conducted in February 2009 in one urban ECEC setting in a designated area of disadvantage. The setting was selected as it shared similar characteristics to the target settings for the study. The pilot study was conducted to establish and practise:

- a protocol for gathering data in the three settings;
- consultation with the educator on her plan for the day and where to film the interactions relevant to this study;
- a procedure for seeking children's assent;
- the filming process using the camera, the audio taping process using the digital audio recorder and the simultaneous taking of field notes;
- piloting the interview, the research diary, and the site notes;
- preparing the data for analysis through transcription, and
- exploring methods of data analysis.

Lessons learned in the pilot study are integrated within the remainder of this chapter. In relation to the main study, a range of methods developed during the pilot

study were employed to collect data in each of the three settings including: profiling of the service to establish its context, which involved documentary mapping actions; non–participant observation of an educator's interactions, in the context of small group experiences, with three to four year old children; a research diary; short debriefing daily discussions, and a formal semi-structured exit interview with the educator in each setting. Further data was collected when the researcher returned two years later to the three educators to test any interpretations made and to gain greater insight into their practice through film-stimulated reflective dialogues.

Profiling and Documentary Mapping Actions

Profiling the settings involved establishing contextual details such as the numbers, ages and gender of children, the ratios of educators to children, the length of day, the typical routine and the curriculum (see Appendix 5 Profile of Setting Form). Interactions do not happen in a vacuum. The profiling and documentary mapping actions were important to capture the individual background and context of each of the settings. Multiple sources of information were required to get an in-depth understanding of each case. Having profiling information allowed some insight to be gained into how the larger context of the settings could shape the interactions that occur in SGLEs. Such information established the key distinguishing features and priorities in each setting.

Observations

Many writers refer to the various dimensions along which observation may be considered (e.g. Denscombe, 2003; Flick, 1998). At its simplest, Denscombe identified that there are essentially two forms of observation research in the social sciences. These are systematic or structured observations which may result in generation of numerical

data using coded schedules, and participant observation (the observer as a member of the community observed). The design of this study involved direct, non-participant observation. Although a qualitative study, a coding schedule (see Appendix 6 Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule) was applied to some of the data. Other data was explored to find noteworthy episodes to reveal the uniqueness and complexity of the cases (Stake, 1995). The main attraction of using observation is for accessing "'real life' in the real world" (Robson, 2002, p. 310).

A digital audio recorder, digital camera and field notes (see Appendix 7 Field Notes Form) were employed to ensure that the full complexity of the interactions between educators and the children in SGLEs was captured. The main data gathering instrument was the audio recorder; the film and field notes were used as back up. This methodology ensured that the person who was speaking could be identified, that non-verbal behaviour was captured and it facilitated accurate transcription. In the pilot study the educator's interactions in a SGLE and during free-play were recorded. It emerged that there were difficulties in trying to capture occasions when the educator was working with one, two and then three children during free-play. In the pilot study (see Appendix 3 Pilot Study Report), and later in the field, it was difficult to decipher what was being said in non-formal interactions during free-play due to the background noise of other children playing freely. See Rationale for Focussing on SGLEs for further discussion on this study's focus on interactions in SGLEs. Recording free-play involved following the educator with the camera (as it is necessary to be reasonably close to the interactions to pick up the conversations), thus making the position as observer more conspicuous. Arising from reflections on the experience of the pilot study it was decided instead to focus on two scheduled experiences per session in the study.

The focus of this study was to establish the nature of interactions in the settings. In so far as possible, it was hoped to capture typical interactions. Consequently, the researcher needed to be as unobtrusive as possible. To achieve this when filming, the camera needed to be stationary. This filming strategy is recommended for research purposes in order to gather a comprehensive and continuous record of interaction (e.g. Erikson, 2006; Walsh, Bakir, Byungho Lee, Chung, Chung & colleagues, 2007). This advice was adopted in the study as far as possible. The researcher adopted a collaborative approach with the research participants. The educators determined in advance the two experiences to be studied daily, when they would be stationary with small groups of children. Therefore, the researcher knew in advance when to film and record and where to place the camera and the audio recorder. She could plan where to position herself to take field notes. The digital audio records were transcribed. The time-consuming nature of transcribing the volume of data emerged in the pilot study (see Observation Logs and Preliminary Analysis for further discussion). The film and field notes supported the furnishing of contextual details such as the location of the learning experience, the educator-child ratio, description of the learning experience, who initiated the interaction, and what was being said.

A further challenge to remaining unobtrusive emerged in the pilot study. It was difficult not to get engaged with the children. When the researcher introduced herself, the children naturally asked lots of questions and the researcher responded. It was necessary to cease any engagement and become an observer. This role was adopted from the beginning of the main study.

Research Diary

A reflective research diary (see Appendix 4 Field Report) was maintained by the researcher to support reflexivity throughout the research. Reflexivity is the process "of researchers reflecting upon their actions and values during research...and the effects that they might have" (Robson, 2002, p. 551). An impression of the day was recorded in addition to queries about the observations, an educator, or a child. Thoughts on the general organisation of the setting, adult interruptions and other issues that emerged were recorded. The diary (of around 16,000 words) was informed by the field notes and the recordings. The researcher wrote about assumptions and biases as they emerged. These issues are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Issues to follow up with the educators in the interview were recorded and acted on. A full record of the researcher's activities, as the study was conducted, was maintained ensuring a clear audit trail.

Debriefing Dialogues

The debriefing dialogues were brief focussed conversations held with the educators at the end of each day's data gathering. Rolfe (2001) argues that such dialogues provide research participants with an opportunity to consider and discuss how the presence of an observer impacted on their practice in naturalistic settings (see Observer Effects for further discussion). The educators were asked to consider to what extent were their interactions and the small group experiences typical of their everyday practice (see Appendix 8 Debriefing Dialogues). In the pilot study, the debriefing dialogues and exit interview were combined. In the study, the timing of the meetings had to be sensitive to the participants' needs and could not intrude on their work. The time commitment for the debriefing dialogues was a critical factor for busy settings. In

practice it was a challenge to meet the educators to discuss the interactions at the end of each session. These debriefing dialogues were a maximum of ten minutes duration.

Exit Interview

A comprehensive semi-structured exit interview was undertaken at the end of the initial data gathering process in each setting with the educator. Denscombe (2007) suggests that semi-structured interviews offer a clear focus on what is to be discussed, with flexibility for the participant to expand and develop ideas raised by the researcher. The rationale for an exit interview was to delve deeper into educators' training, priorities and practices regarding their interactions in small group experiences with young children. Denscombe (2007, p.174) recommends that interviews are the most suitable method when the researcher needs "to gain insights into...people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences". As was the case in the pilot study, each interview lasted about an hour (see Appendix 9 Interview Schedule). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The aims of the exit interview were:

1. To facilitate participants to offer clarifications or explanations regarding the observations made.
2. To explain that the focus of analysis would be on pedagogical practices generally.
3. To discuss issues relating to interactions and to enable educators to furnish more detail in relation to their planning and decision making regarding the children's learning experiences.
4. To explore the supports that the educators have had in their professional development in relation to planning SGLEs and interactions with children.

5. To explore in detail the factors that both enables and inhibits interactions with children.
6. To facilitate participants to ask questions, raise issues and offer other information pertinent to interactions and/or this research study.

The exit interviews offered limited insights into the nature and conduct of ECEC from the educator's perspective. A deeper exploration of "why things have come to be what they are, as well as descriptions of current problems" could be ascertained (Stark and Torrance, 2004, p.35). It was decided that the addition of a 'film-stimulated reflective dialogue' (see Appendix 10 Film-stimulated Reflective Dialogue) with each participant in this research project would enhance the findings.

Film-stimulated Reflective Dialogues

A 'film-stimulated reflective dialogue' (from here on called reflective dialogue) is a "two-way discussion between research partners...intended to uncover significant thinking about day-to-day practice through the process of scaffolded discussion about images of that practice" (Moyles & Paterson, 2001, p. 161). The strategy of joint viewing and interrogation of filmed practice by research partners is developing (e.g. Erikson, 2006; Gillen, Cameron, Tapanya, Pinto, Hancock, Young & Accorti Gamannossi, 2007; Hancock, Gillen & Pinto, 2010; Hseuh & Tobin, 2003). Not only does film transport the viewer to a sense of 'being there', it also affords the opportunity for multiple iterations of data collection (Gillen, et al., 2007). In the SPEEL study (see Chapters 1 and 3) reflective dialogues were used to access expert practitioner's knowledge, theories and practices regarding filmed sequences of their practice which they themselves had chosen to discuss with the researchers (Moyles et al., 2002a). The

goal of reflective dialogues is to achieve mutual understanding between researcher and research participant. Moyles et al. (2002b) identify from their previous experience that reflective dialogues could support educators to consider and articulate elements of their practice that traditional interviewing methods were unlikely to reveal. For further information on the use of reflective dialogues see Moyles and Paterson (2001), Appendix C (as cited in Moyles et al., 2002a).

It was anticipated in this study that the educators would be enabled to talk in greater depth and to provide further insight and understanding of what underpins their practices through the use of reflective dialogues. The educators were asked to select two excerpts from two selected filmed SGLEs which they felt best reflected their approach to their practice. It was explained that the researcher wanted to understand more about their principles, theories/ philosophies, perceptions and the challenges that inform and shape their practices. Drawing from the SPEEL project, prompt questions were given in advance of the viewing (see Appendix 10 Film-stimulated Reflective Dialogues). It emerged during the reflective dialogues, however, that none of the three educators had chosen a five minute film segment, although two of the educators (Rachel in Cherry and Sarah in Birch) had viewed the films in advance. The passage of time had made it hard for the educators to select a particular sequence. Consequently, the educators and the researcher watched the relevant films together in full.

In the first reflective dialogue (Rachel in Cherry) the first film was viewed jointly by the researcher and educator. A discussion ensued, followed by the viewing of the second film. The researcher was concerned that the discussion on the first film impacted on the educator's perspective on the second film. Based on that learning, the process with the two remaining reflective dialogues consisted of viewing both films and then

having the discussion. The process of reflective dialogues afforded an opportunity to more fully understand the unique perspective of each of the educators. In addition the researcher presented a summary of the draft findings. Both processes provided the opportunity to check the adequacy of the analysis, and further afforded the educators an opportunity to make clarifications and redress any errors or pre-suppositions on behalf of the researcher.

A field report which outlines the experience of the initial data collection can be found in Appendix 4 Field Report. The report details modifications to the site selection plan. The detail of the observations recorded and the protocol adopted while in the field is portrayed. The research diary, some initial findings, and finally challenges and dilemmas experienced are revealed. The criteria for the selection of settings and the research participants are now discussed.

Criteria for Selection of Settings and Research Participants

A combination of suitability and pragmatism underpinned the selection of the settings and consequently the research participants. It was proposed in this study to use a purposive sample of three settings as the settings have particular characteristics in common in the area of study (Cohen et al., 2007; Denscombe, 2003; Robson, 2002). The characteristics were first, location in an urban area designated as disadvantaged by the DES. Children who may be at risk of future educational underachievement are more likely to attend ECEC settings in areas of disadvantage. Second, these settings catered for three and four year old children. Children of this age cohort are the focus of current policy (DES, 2005; OMCYA, 2009b). Third, each setting was representative of the three ECEC setting types (outside of the primary school system) where the day-to-day

operation of the setting was supported by public and/or philanthropic funding at that time (for other similarities that emerged during data gathering, see Table 7 Portrait and analysis of three settings). This study was undertaken prior to the introduction of the *Free Pre-School Year*. The field work was restricted to three settings due to the time constraints on the study. Any description of the individual settings is deliberately broad to ensure the confidentiality of the settings (see Chapter 4 Notified Risks and Chapter 3 Provision of ECEC in Areas of Disadvantage for further information on settings in areas of disadvantage). One setting was a directly funded health services executive setting, the second was a community childcare setting funded by the health services executive and philanthropic funding, and the third was a voluntary early intervention setting also funded by the health services executive, and philanthropic funding.

The managers of each of the three settings were approached and permission was sought for their setting to become part of the study. One educator volunteered to become part of the study in each of the three settings. It was agreed to conduct video and audio recorded observations on the three educators and their interactions with the children in small group experiences, for one day a week for four weeks. This was to be preceded by two days for profiling of the setting and general observation (called access/profile days) and to allow the children, and staff, to adjust to the presence of the researcher as a watching and a writing visitor. See Appendix 4 for details of the protocols followed in each session, the duration of observations, daily research reflections, challenges and the audit trail. In addition, the three educators were asked and agreed to engage in the reflective dialogues.

There is no one right way to undertake research in early childhood (Aubrey et al., 2000). However, "all research needs to be theoretically grounded, rigorously analysed,

feasible and ethically fair and just" (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. x). The next section considers the ethics of the research process.

Ethical Considerations

The study conforms to the guidelines of the St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Research Ethics Committee. Educators were told in advance the nature of the research, exactly what would be expected of them, the potential risks and that they could withdraw from the process at any stage (see Appendix 11 Plain Language Statement). Consent of the children's parents to undertake observations in the settings was obtained (see Appendix 13 Informed Consent Form for Parents).

Informed consent - the right to autonomy, for participants to determine what is in their best interests - is the key to ethical research. Children legally cannot give consent. Thus, in the case of young children "it is imperative to gain the consent of the child's parents" or guardians (Coady, 2001, p.66). *Article 12* of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) promotes that the child's standpoint be considered with regard to age and maturity. Therefore, it is good practice to ask the children to give 'assent' (an indication from the children that they are happy to continue to be involved in the study). More recently Conroy and Harcourt (2009) have called for 'informed assent' particularly in research projects where children's views are elicited, though it is acknowledged that there are challenges to meaningfully gaining children's assent (e.g. Conroy & Harcourt, 2009; Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Ethical Strategies for Research Involving Human Participants

The pilot study (see Appendix 3 Pilot Study Report) was conducted in a setting where children were routinely filmed with parental consent. Parental consent was obtained by the educator for the use of film during the pilot study. The researcher also introduced herself to the parents and children individually, on the day, as they arrived in the setting. The purpose of the pilot study was to practise the filming, taping, note taking and later transcribing. Children's assent was not strictly required, given that parental consent had already been obtained. However, the researcher was anxious to explore ways of garnering children's assent in relation to filming in this study. The desire to gain children's assent was premised on the centrality of the rights of children as citizens and active agents in their own lives. However, research on gaining children's assent is limited; "children's continued lack of voice and power" persists in research and practice (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 253). The children's assent to be filmed was sought in the following way. A sheet with two images: a smiling face and a cross face was shown to the children (see Figure 9).

 A Smiling Face: happy to be filmed

 A Cross Face: not happy to be filmed

Figure 9 Children's assent sheet during pilot study

The children were asked "*Is it ok that I film x (educator's name) and you and your friends*"? The smiling face was indicated and the researcher said "*This means you are happy to be filmed*" and then the cross face was indicated and the researcher said "*This*

means you are not happy to be filmed". The children were asked to point to the picture that represents how they felt about being filmed. One boy immediately pointed to the cross face and made growling sounds. It was confirmed by the researcher "*OK so you don't want me to film you*"? He responded "*I like the growly face*". His friends agreed and started to make monster sounds and pointed to the "growly face". Some children pointed to the smiley face. The educator and researcher quickly realised that they were focussing on the image, not the issue of filming. A different approach was then attempted; simply talking to them. The researcher explained that she just wanted to know could she film the educator and themselves talking. One of the children registered distress. She shrank away, shaking her head. This clearly had implications for how children's assent in the main study should be secured. This presented itself then as an issue that needed very serious attention. The researcher consulted the literature for guidance.

Articles in the fields of health, bioethics, social work, and early childhood education relating to assent and consent of children were reviewed. One article summarised the empirical literature on children aged from four to twenty one years and their competence for consent and assent in research and medical treatment settings in 29 studies (Miller, Drotar, and Kodish, 2005). Of those 29, only one study related to four year old children (Schwartz, 1972). The recommendations arising from this meta-analysis suggested that children's competence to participate in decision making was related to their understanding, their reasoning capacity and their voluntariness. The literature revealed that assent would appear to be dependent on the child's level of cognitive and emotional maturity and psychological state. A consensus emerged from the literature that for child assent the youngest age was seven years (e.g. Fisher, 2005;

Ladd, 2003; National Institutes of Health, 2004; Sterling and Walco 2003; Whittle, Shah, Wilfond, Gensler, & Wendler, 2004).

However, as outlined in Chapter 3 and argued by Conroy and Harcourt (2009) and Pascal and Bertram (2009) young children have agency, competence and human rights. From that perspective, the threshold of seven years is disputed. Conroy (2007, cited in Conroy and Harcourt, 2009) engaged five and six year olds in research about their understanding of their learning environments and secured assent from the children by discussing the concepts. Harcourt (2008, cited in Conroy and Harcourt) conducted a study with five year old children on their views about quality. The researcher is persuaded by the view expressed by Conroy and Harcourt that it is the responsibility of researchers who wish to include the child standpoint, to ensure that children are indeed being considered as research partners and that the research design focuses on working *with* children in research. However, this study differs from the Conroy and Harcourt study in a number of ways. First, the focus of this study was on the educator's interactions with children. Second, the researcher was not engaging in a research conversation with the children themselves. Third, the researcher was not asking the children about their experiences or views. Fourth, for the integrity of the study it was important to maintain the status as non-participant observer; a 'watching and a writing visitor' (see Observer Effects for further discussion). This was a non-participant observation and the consequences of impacting on or altering the dynamics in the classroom could diminish the findings. Finally, the video was to be used solely by the researcher for analysis purposes and was not to be shown to anyone else. The research then proceeded on the basis of parental consent and the educators were asked to explain to the children in advance of her arrival, that the researcher was a 'watching and a writing' visitor who would be using a camera.

Notified Risks

The settings were advised of the risks associated with being involved in the study. First, the researcher reminded the educators of her duty of care to report child abuse, to the relevant authorities, should she witness it. Second, the researcher would be obliged to report any serious infringements of the *Child Care (Preschool Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006* (DHC, 2006).

The third risk in this study related to confidentiality. The researcher undertook to ensure confidentiality as much as possible. Transcriptions from the observations and interviews were part of the thesis, but under no circumstances were names or any identifying characteristics included. The researcher maintained confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study by only referring to settings in general as part of urban areas designated as disadvantaged. The names of the settings, educators and children were changed. Further assurances relating to access to the material and future reporting arrangements, and the safe storage of the data and ultimate deletion were given (see Appendix 11 Plain Language Statement, Appendix 12 Informed Consent for Practitioners and Appendix 13 Informed Consent for Parents for more detail). The next section illustrates the time spent in the settings, the sources of data and the range of data collected.

Overview of the Duration of Time, the Sources, and Range of Data Collected

Duration of Time Spent in the Settings

The total duration of data gathering across the three settings was 68 hours. All of the 68 hours of data gathered was drawn on for analysis informed by the literature review. Of those 68 hours, 40 hours were focussed observations and debriefings. Of those 40 hours, 325 minutes were filmed, audio recorded, noted, and transcribed. Of those 325 minutes, 192 minutes were subjected to a line-by-line analysis and 133 minutes were the focus of reflective dialogues. Table 1 below details the dates and duration of time spent in the settings and the corresponding activities undertaken.

Table 1
Duration of Data Collection

	Setting 1 Cherry		**Setting 2 Rowan**		**Setting 3 Birch**	
Activity	**Date**	**Hours**	**Date**	**Hours**	**Date**	**Hours**
Access/Profile	31.03:09	9:00-12:00	24.03.09	9:00-12:00	26.03.09	8:30-12:00
	07.04.09	9:00-12:00	01.04.09	9:00-12:00	02.04.09	8:30-12:00
		6 hours		6 hours		7 hours
Observations/ debriefings	21.04.09	9:00-12:00 13:30-14:30	22.04.09	9:00-12:00	23.04.09	8:30-12:00
	28.04.09	9:00-12:00	29.05.09	9:00-12:00	30.04.09	8:30-12:00
	05.05.09	9:00-12:00 13:30-14:30	06.05.09	9:00-12:00	08.05.09	8:30-12:00
	12.05.09	9:00-12:00	13.05.09	9:00-12:00	14.05.09	8:30-12:00
		14 hours		12 hours		14 hours
Interviews	12.05.09	14:30-15:30	13.05.09	12:15-13:00	14.05.09	12:00 –13:00
		1 hour		1 hour		1 hour
Reflective Dialogues	12.04.11	14: 25 – 16:10	15.04.11	10:00 -12:00	20.04.2011	9:30 – 11:30
		2 hours		2 hours		2 hours
Total hours of data gathering		23 hours		21 hours		24 hours

The number of data collecting research events, which generated data, in the research sites is summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Summary of Sources for Generation of Data in Number of Research Events

Method of Data Gathering	Setting			Total
	Cherry	Rowan	Birch	
(a) Profile of Setting	2	2	2	6
(b) Site Visit Book	6	6	6	18
(c) Field Notes Forms	4	4	4	12
(d) Digital Audio Recordings	4	4	4	12
(e) Digital Video Camera Recordings	4	4	4	12
(f) Debriefing/Clarification notes	4	4	4	12
(g) Educator Interviews	1	1	1	3
(h) Research Diary	1	1	1	3
(i) Reflective Dialogues	1	1	1	3
Total data sources in units	27	27	27	81

Table 3 below depicts the full range of data collected including the method used, the output from that method, and all the group experiences recorded. In addition the 12 SGLEs are highlighted in bold and italics. See Rationale for Focussing on Small Group Learning Experiences (p.102) as to why these particular group experiences were fore grounded.

Table 3

Range of Data Collected

Method	Output	Cherry	Rowan	Birch	Total Hours
		Date	**Date**	**Date**	
Access/Profile Adjustment to researcher's presence. Capturing profile and description of the setting	Site Visit Notebook Profile Form/ mapping rooms, routines and areas Talking to staff Research diary	31.03:09	24.03.09	26.03.09	9 ½
		07.04.09	01.04.09	02.04.09	9 ½
Running record	Site Visit Notebook Research diary	All dates	All dates	All dates	
Recorded Observations	Digital audio recorder and digital film of interactions Field Notes Scheduled small group experiences (in italics) became the eventual focus of analysis	21.04.09 Circle time ***Small group work***	22.04.09 Recall time Break time ***Small group time***	23.04.09 Planning/ Breakfast ***Small group time***	10½
		28.04.09 Circle time ***Small group work***	29.05.09 Recall time Break time ***Small group time***	30.04.09 Planning/ Breakfast Recall/ ***Small group time***	9 ½
		05.05.09 Circle time ***Small group work***	06.05.09 Recall time Break time ***Small group time***	08.05.09 Planning/Breakfast Recall/ ***Small group time***	10 ½
		12.05.09 Circle time ***Small group work***	13.05.09 Recall time Break time ***Small group time***	14.05.09 Planning/ Breakfast Recall ***Small group time***	9 ½
Debriefings	With educators on leaving; recorded in Site Visit Notebook				
Interviews	Audio records and notes on questionnaire form	12.05.09	13.05.09	14.05.09	3
Reflective Dialogues	Audio records and prompts questions Findings of the study clarified and verified	12.04.11	15.04.11	20.04.2011	6
Total hours of data gathering		23 hours	21 hours	24 hours	68

Data Analysis

Observation Logs and Preliminary Analysis

The pilot study revealed the considerable time it took to transcribe the observation data. Depending on the clarity of the interactions of the focus group, it took from eight to ten hours to transcribe fifteen minutes of data (see Table 4 for total transcription time). As a result it was decided to take Swann's (2001) and Merriam's (1998) approach and not transcribe every observation episode. Instead observation logs were created drawing from the recordings, the field notes and the research diary.

One log was compiled for each day's recording in each setting. The log provided a synopsis of the observations along with comments/first analysis on the interactions. Identifying features and contextual information were annotated (see Appendix 14 Observation Logs). The three exit interviews with the educators were transcribed in full, and Merriam's (1998) procedure of data logging was adapted for the observations. This process provided a comprehensive record of all of the observation data.

Rationale for Focussing on Small Group Learning Experiences

A decision was made to focus on small group activities in each setting. The analysis then became focussed on what was called group work in one setting (Cherry) and small group time in two others (Rowan and Birch). These were small group experiences which routinely took place each day in each of the three settings. A consistent title for the group times was required and the decision was made to call them small group learning experiences to foreground the educative nature of these experiences. SGLEs became the focus of analysis for four reasons.

1. Since educators schedule the experiences it was anticipated that there would be, at a minimum, a shared focus of attention between the educators and the children. Smith (1999) advised that a shared context of experience and meaning should be established in order for intersubjectivity to be achieved between children and adults. This is important given the focus of the study on interactions. Intersubjectivity involves striving for mutual understanding in dialogue (Trevarthen, 1980). In SGLEs, therefore, there is the potential for EPCs between educators and the children.
2. In Smith's study of 200 infants and toddlers in 100 ECEC settings in New Zealand, she identified that "joint attention episodes occurred at about the same level in one-to-one and group activities" (1999, p. 95). This demonstrates that educators can interact in a reciprocal manner with individual children in small groups. Furthermore, if children are to gain an understanding about their world, they need to engage in shared experiences of relevant events and scripts with adults and peers (Smith).
3. There was a greater likelihood of educators being physically present to engage in conversations during scheduled small group experiences. For example during the break times and breakfast time filmed in two settings, the educators were regularly absent while organising food and drinks.
4. It was observed during the pilot study that the educator engaged with the children in episodes of EPCs during small group time. It was considered that these could then be anticipated in similar experiences in similar settings.

Table 4 below details the scheduled small group experiences captured each day of recording and the transcription time.

Table 4
Selected Scheduled Small Group Learning Experiences for Analysis

	Setting 1 Cherry		Setting 2 Rowan		Setting 3 Birch	
	Title	**Time/length**	**Title**	**Time/length**	**Title**	**Time /length**
Day 1	'Understanding words & Bob'	13.45 – 14.18 33 minutes	'Sand & water'	11.12 – 11.37 25 minutes	'Making necklaces'	11.25 –12.03 39 minutes
Day 2	'Making monsters'	11.15 – 11.58 43 minutes	'Washing the animals'	11.24 – 11.47 23 minutes	'Making play-dough'	11.27 -11.56 29 minutes
Day 3	'Occupations & hide & seek'	13.53 – 14.10 17 minutes	'Hammering play-dough'	11.18-11.46 28 minutes	'Making people'	11.37- 11.56 19 minutes
Day 4	'Exploring fish'	11.27 – 11.49 22 minutes	'Making play-dough'	11.22 – 11.49 27 minutes	'Decorating ducks & foam'	11.40-12.00 20 minutes
		115 minutes		103 minutes		107 minutes
Grand Total Film:		**325 minutes of film (5 hours, 24 minutes)**				
Total Time for Transcription:		**210 hours**				

Creating Vignettes

Before preparing the data for transcription 12 vignettes were written (see Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes). These were short descriptive pieces which outlined the four SGLEs in each of the three settings. Each vignette contained the day, the setting, the date, the title, the time, the location within the setting, the number of adults and children participating in the activity, the length of the activity, the focus of the activity and the materials used. The beginning, the middle and the end of the activity were outlined as were any defining or unusual features of that day. Finally the vignettes sketched a brief content of the interactions.

Transcription Format and Notation System

A traditional and common format of transcription was adopted, with speaking turns tracked in sequence (Swann, 2001). Reference codes (see below) were established so that the data could be identified and stored electronically for easy access. The anonymity of the participants and the settings was secured by changing the names.

Punctuation is also an issue in transcription. In the transcriptions of the pilot study an attempt was made to convey the sense of what was being said with an accurate and understandable portrayal of the conversations and the context. Wells' (1985) transcription notation system was adopted as the most suitable scheme to convey conversation in naturalistic settings as it is comprehensive and allows for non-verbal as well as verbal expression (see Appendix 16 Transcription Notation System for detail).

Coding and Categorising Selected Observational Data

An initial coding schedule (see Appendix 6 Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule [ECICS]) was devised based on the literature in Chapter 3 on effective pedagogy and theories relating to interactions. It was drawn from Flanders' (1970) *Interaction Analysis System* as cited in Robson (2002, p. 330); Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, pp. 144-145), Fisher (2007, p. 618) and Moyles, et al. (2002a, pp. 169-170). The schedule was divided into descriptors. These descriptors were the features of interactions which were thought to enable EPCs. Each line of educator interaction was deductively coded; however, there was flexibility to inductively code allowing other categories to emerge. Therefore it was aimed to make systematic inferences.

A trial transcription was pasted into a Microsoft Office Excel 2007 Workbook and the coding schedule was applied to the data. It emerged that there was a high degree of questioning and directions and the coding was refined (see Appendix 17 Refined Coding). Excel is a computer software package which generates spreadsheets, traditionally used for quantitative analysis. The spreadsheet offers distinct advantages in terms of qualitative coding and manipulating the data. It allowed for line-by-line analysis within one activity, within one setting and across settings. Great care was paid to the coding of the transcriptions.

This coding strategy was adopted to present a comprehensive overview of all the interactions in selected SGLEs recorded. In adopting this process it was attempted to avoid "narrative fraud" (Brauner, 1974, as cited in Stake, 1995, p.130) where focussing on selected episodes may reflect the interests of the researcher but not the nature of the interactions. The first two SGLEs in each setting were chosen for intensive coding analysis for reasons of consistency of the participants, variety of experiences and the amount of interactions. In Birch, the last two SGLEs were conducted with the children who had diagnosed speech and language difficulties. In addition, these SGLEs were conducted with a second adult, which changed the dynamic of the interactions. A further consideration was in relation to the variety of the SGLEs on offer. In Rowan the two final experiences involved playdough which also occurred once in Birch. In Birch the two final experiences involved pasting materials. Finally in both Cherry and Birch, the first two SGLEs extended over the longest period of time (see Table 4 above). The transcriptions were substantially longer, and therefore offered the greatest number of interactions. The remaining SGLEs were drawn on for further analysis in relation to the nature of the interactions; in particular what was underpinning the educator's practices, in the reflective dialogues (see Table 6 and Table 7).

The Excel Worksheet was set up with a tag (identifying name) for the specific activity, the line number for reference, the transcription text and then up to five columns for analysis (see Appendix 18 Excel Codes Framework for Analysis for detail). See Figure 10 for an illustration below.

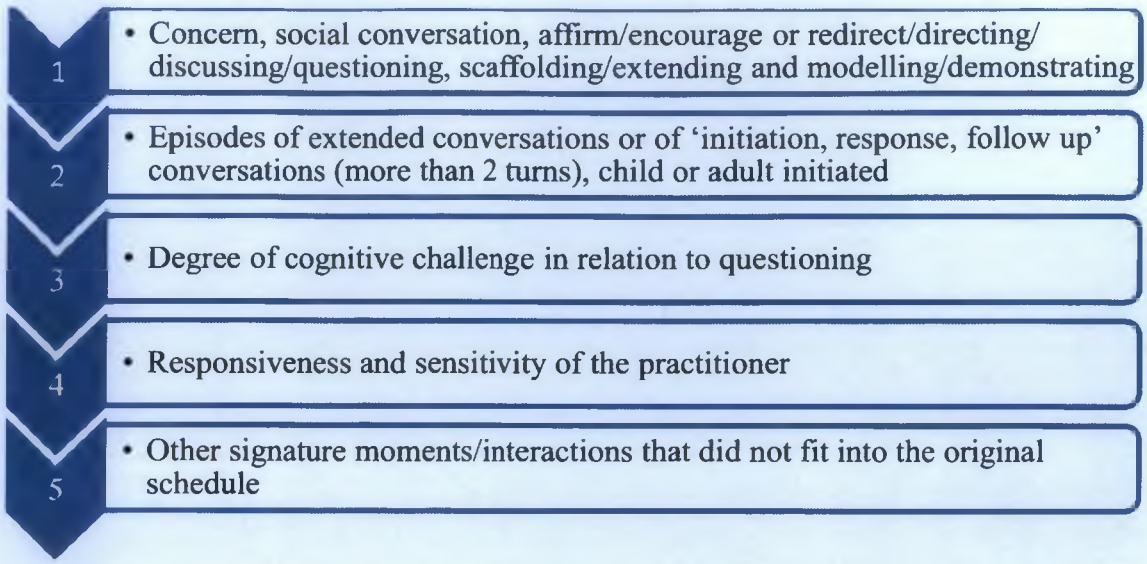

Figure 10 Descriptor codes for analysis of selected transcripts in Excel

Example

The example below depicts one interaction which could be deductively coded from the ECPIC Schedule, and is part of the unit of analysis named AI Bob (Adult Initiated, topic Bob), and demonstrates responsiveness on the part of the adult.

Educator affirms a child: encouraging or affirming child action effort or behaviour

C1Bob 272 [Finbar completes task.]
C1Bob 273 Rachel: [As puppet.] *Woohoo! Woohoo! Good job!*

Coded as: Affirming; AI Bob; Res/Sens

The software was used in the same way as if the researcher was coding by hand. The advantage to using Excel was the systematic use of codes; the numbering of the lines of text for easy access[7]; the sorting and filtering of coded text and accompanying quotes and the ability, bearing in mind a number of caveats, to present the data in

[7] The line numbers are not included in the presentation of data in Chapter 5 Presentation of data and analysis.

graphs. Those caveats include a need to avoid using the data in a positivistic way, particularly attributing importance to the frequency of occurrence of particular codes. In the coding of the transcripts some interactions were more common than others and this was interpreted as indicating that further investigation was warranted (King, 2009).

The use of codes/descriptors to analyse episodes of conversation was akin to content analysis which, though usually quantitative (Denscombe, 2007), can be used by qualitative researchers who wish to label and explore text (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Denscombe (2007), referring to 'conversation analysis', acknowledges that the key strength of such analysis is the opportunity to delve deeper into the nuances of the data. A weakness of this type of analysis is the lack of a transparent audit trail. However, the process of coding adopted is transparent.

Analysing All the Data

The remaining data was read and/or listened to several times to establish the practices and features of significance, and develop themes and sub-themes. A five stage process of formal data analysis was applied to all the data outlined below. This process draws from the constant comparative method developed by Strauss & Corbin (1990) and is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5
Summary of the Process of Data Analysis

Stage	Process
Stage 1	Observation logs created/a first analysis of the data conducted Choice made to focus on SGLEs Vignettes created
Stage 2	Transcription of the first scheduled SGLE Trial Transfer into Excel worksheet and trial analysis Revision of coding schedule Transcription of remaining eleven scheduled SGLEs Transfer of each educator's first two SGLEs into Excel Revision of coding schedule/analysis framework in Excel to incorporate questioning and level of cognitive challenge
Stage 3	Contextual details sought drawing from full range of data Recurring interactions sought to establish a sense of practice that could be representative and typical of each educator's practice
Stage 4	Consistency of coding revisited A return to all the data with a sceptical eye to seek contradictory evidence Significant episodes identified within the remaining two SGLEs worthy of further analysis
Stage 5	Return to the educators to gain further insight using the films of the second two SGLEs Findings verified with the educators A final return to all the data to ensure accuracy

This five stage process of analysis aimed to create a detailed portrayal of each educator's interactions in the scheduled experiences. Inevitably there are limitations to this case study approach. The next and final section outlines those limitations (listed in Research Strategy, pp. 82-83) and how they were addressed.

Limitations of the Study and How They Were Addressed

Contaminating Observer Effects

It is a challenge for researchers to achieve the aim of examining situations as they naturally occur, without creating an effect due to their presence (Denscombe, 2007). Undoubtedly, the presence of an observer impacted on the setting and could potentially

even have distorted the interactions studied. As mentioned above, this raised methodological and further ethical concerns. As far as possible, the difficulties that the researcher's presence could make were acknowledged and the educators were encouraged to try and engage in their typical learning experiences and to interact as normally as they could.

The same protocol was conducted every day. The researcher always arrived ahead of the children, ascertained the plan for the day, set up the camera in its permanent location and settled down to writing immediately. The researcher aimed to keep movement to a minimum. It was crucially important that all participants were treated with respect and consideration. The researcher tried to remain as discrete and unobtrusive as possible. This in itself can create a further limitation. Complete detachment might be considered as anti-social, whereas being intensely involved risks compromising the researcher role (Robson, 2002). The researcher explained to the participants that she must remain in the observer role and she modelled the role of direct observer from the beginning.

Observer Bias

The most significant limitation was that of observer bias in the undertaking of the observations. Through careful placing of two of the three instruments (video and audiotape) and the taking of field notes, it was ensured that a valid description of what happened was gathered. The camera was placed in one selected area as close to the action as possible. The audio recorder was placed in a different location but also close-by and the researcher was stationed as observer close enough to see what it happening and to take field notes. These three methods achieved triangulation in the capturing of data and therefore helped to minimise observer bias, at least in the transcription.

Attempts to address observer bias were further supported by the five stage constant comparative analysis method outlined and the establishment of a clear audit trail. The researcher engaged in a reflexive process of consistently observing her own assumptions, biases, and pre-suppositions, and these were recorded in the reflective journal (Robson, 2002). The researcher's history and pre-suppositions are stated in Chapter 1. Her work experience led the researcher to continually remind herself of her role as researcher in the process, and not a HighScope advisor or an evaluator. The researcher's stance on the cultural reproduction of educational inequality is stated in Chapter 2. Her view of children as competent people with agency is revealed in Chapter 3.

The Time Consuming Nature of Observations and Transcription

A further limitation of undertaking observations was the time-consuming nature of gathering the data, and the subsequent transcription (Stake, 1995). This was due, in some instances, to the background noise and louder voices of other educators and children in the room. A further challenge was making sense of some of the children's utterances and the issue of children speaking simultaneously. The time it took for transcription was further compounded by having two recording instruments. Both devices had to be played back repeatedly to hear what was going on. However, a wealth of data was revealed in the pilot, with the potential of eliciting depth of analysis. The decision was made to continue the transcriptions even though considerable data would be generated. In the end, the time consuming nature of this process was compensated for by the rich descriptions of the interactions that were gathered.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of validity and reliability can be a concern in qualitative studies (e.g. Cohen, et al. 2007; Edwards, 2001; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Smith (1991, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 257) suggested that case studies are "the logically weakest method of knowing". As discussed earlier, however, many researchers have argued successfully that qualitative research is based on fundamentally different sets of axioms than quantitative research and is just as credible when conducted with rigour (e.g. Cohen et al., 2007; Edwards, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Yin, 2006). However, researchers are required to ensure their research produces valid and reliable evidence. A statement about validity is "a judgment about the extent to which it can be said that the study has captured important features of the field and has analysed them with integrity" (Edwards, 2001, p. 124). In qualitative research the term trustworthiness is used rather than validity. Trustworthiness, or to what extent can confidence be placed in the outcomes of the study, refers to the named perspective of the researcher, multiple methods of data collection to ensure triangulation, the richness, honesty, depth and scope of the data gathered, developing an audit trail, and member checking (Cohen et al., 2007; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

As detailed above, to ensure triangulation in this study three sources of data collection in the observations were used. Furthermore, the educators were interviewed to achieve methodological triangulation (Denzin 1978). Educators also saw transcripts of the interviews to ensure member checking. They engaged in reflective dialogues with the researcher and the draft findings were reported to them to clarify any assumptions made by the researcher.

Yin (2003) emphasises the value in making explicit all protocols and steps involved in the study, and to conduct it as though another person was looking over the researcher's shoulder. Ideally, if the same research protocols were repeated by a different researcher in the same setting, then the same findings and conclusions would accrue. Consistent with this approach, the case study protocol was documented. Thus, a clear audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which details the process of the research decisions was established and mapped out for the reader.

Issues of Generalisability

Legitimate doubts may be raised as to how far the findings from one or a few cases are generalisable to others (Stark & Torrance, 2004). This was a small scale study and the findings were mainly generalisable to the specific settings and participants; they cannot be universally generalisable. As articulated by Stake (1995, p. 8), the "real business of case study is particularization not generalization". However, in this study, although each educator and indeed each setting was unique, they were also singular examples of the broad range of educators in community, voluntary and statutory education and care settings. It was endeavoured in the study to highlight significant features on which comparison with other settings can be made such as: the type of setting, background information on participants, the physical location, timing and type of learning experiences (Denscombe, 2003). The author attempted to include enough information on how the case compares to others so that the reader may make their own informed judgements on the study's generalisability (Denscombe, 2003; Stark & Torrance, 2004).

Defining the Boundaries of the Case

A case study by its nature is bounded. However, it is also complex, and intricate. As a result, there are inherent challenges in defining those boundaries (Edwards, 2001; Denscombe, 2003; Yin, 2003). If the boundaries are difficult to define then it is difficult to decide what sources of data to include and what to exclude. Edwards (2001) usefully suggests looking at a case study in terms of concentric circles, with the major focus of research at the centre and as one progresses towards the outer rings, the interest decreases. Therefore, in the study, the focus at the centre was on one educator's interactions with children in SGLEs in each of three settings. The next layer concerns the expectations and pedagogical intentions and organisation of the educator. Moving outwards again, the next layer includes the structure of the day, the curriculum, and the management of same. Further levels could include parental perspectives and finally governmental policies on the experiences of three to four year old children and on the training of early childhood educators. In this study there was a clear vision of the boundaries to the case (Denscombe, 2003).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology for this research. The design of the study and the research paradigm were outlined. The adoption of a case study approach was justified. The findings from the pilot study were integrated within the chapter. The methods were outlined and incorporated profiling the setting, observations, daily debriefing dialogues, a formal semi-structured exit interview and reflective dialogues. The criteria for the selection of the three settings and research participants were detailed, ethical considerations and strategies were outlined in addition to the display of

the duration of time, the sources and the range of data collected. The preparation of the data for analysis was followed by the limitations of the study and how those limitations were addressed. Chapter 5 now presents the data from the fieldwork and analyses that data.

CHAPTER 5 PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the findings of this research, in order to answer the research question: what is the nature of the pedagogy, in particular the interactions, occurring in SGLEs between early childhood educators and three and four year old children, attending three selected ECEC settings? The study was located in urban areas designated as disadvantaged. The presentation and analysis of data is presented in four parts. The first part presents a portrait of the three settings and the three educators. Part two examines pedagogical organisation. Part three focuses on the educator-child interactions. The fourth part explores the content and the delivery of the SGLEs. Finally, a summary and the main findings are provided. Table 6 presents a summary of the data sources and how the data is employed in order of the presentation of findings (in italics) in the text.

Table 6
Summary of Uses of All Data

Data sources	**Purpose and where presented in Chapter 5**
Mapping profiles, site visit notes, field notes forms, research diary, interview transcriptions, and reflective dialogues	To capture a *Portrait of the three settings and the three educators.*
Interview transcriptions and video and audio transcriptions, site visits notes, research diary, and reflective dialogues	To capture the educators' *Pedagogical organisation*
Output from line-by-line analysis of six scheduled SGLEs	To provide detailed analysis of the *Interactions*
All data: line-by-line analysis, transcriptions of all 12 SGLEs, observation logs, site visits notes, research diary, debriefing dialogues, interview transcriptions and reflective dialogues	To present and analyse the *Content and delivery of the SGLEs*

The inspiration for this thesis arises from a perspective that promotes educational equality through the concept of 'extended purposive conversations'. EPCs are a key indicator of quality ECEC (see Chapter 3), where equality of esteem and respect for

diversity is manifested (see Chapter 2). In presenting and analysing the findings the factors that contribute to such conversations are foregrounded.

Portrait of the Three Settings and the Three Educators

These portraits draw from the mapping profiles, the site visit notes of the observations, the field notes forms, the research diary, the transcribed interviews and the reflective dialogues. The settings and educators are presented in the following order: the setting Cherry with the educator Rachel, then Rowan with Katie and finally, Birch with Sarah. Greater focus on the educators underlying philosophies as part of pedagogical organisation are presented in the next section.

Cherry

Cherry was a Health Service Executive (HSE) funded setting. At the time of initial data gathering Cherry catered for 23 children. In order to secure a place a child must have been referred to the setting by the HSE (by a public health nurse, speech therapist, or psychologist). The opening hours were from 9:30 to 16:00. The curriculum was identified as 'play-based and emergent'. There were four educators in total, all of whom were qualified in ECEC to HETAC Level 8. In addition to the educators, there was a manager and a cook. The children were divided into three groups. Rachel, who was the research participant in Cherry, was responsible for a group of eight children. The setting was in temporary accommodation at the time of initial data gathering. It comprised of three group rooms, a separate kitchen and two offices. There was a small paved garden/patio. Each group of children used the three rooms in the setting in rotation throughout the day. One room was dedicated to communal mealtimes,

gymnastics, dancing and general gross motor activities. A second room was divided into interest areas, not specifically labelled but clearly distinguishable: an art area, a book area, a home area and a table top area (see Appendix 5 for a sketch of that room). A third room contained tables and chairs, a book stand, and shelves with table top activities. All the interest areas were appropriately equipped. It was recorded in the research diary that:

> Overall the setting appears welcoming and warm with a generous lobby space. Photos of the staff are on the wall and some representations are on display that the children did of themselves using a variety of materials. There is a large room which has been set aside for dining, meeting and PE. The room where Rachel spends time with her group is inviting and attractive. All of the equipment, of which there is a variety, is accessible to the children. (Research diary, 31.03.2009, Impressions of Cherry)

Rachel

At the time of the initial data gathering Rachel was twenty eight years of age. She had been working full time with children in the research site (Cherry) for three and a half years. She had achieved a Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Level 8 Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education and had participated in a broad range of training in child protection, first aid, sign language, diversity issues, and speech and language programmes. Throughout the study she was pursuing a qualification in play therapy.

Rachel was the only practitioner in the room with up to eight children. She was observed as being consistently calm, respectful and polite to the children. She could be heard laughing often. She used a broad range of strategies such as sign language, humour, puppets, and often referred to children's home lives. During free play she was observed being attentive to children, supporting children's play, being playful and dividing her time equally between children. During group activities, she actively sought

to engage, and hold each and every child's attention. She remained focussed on the task within the group activities and maintained conversational control. Signature features of Rachel's interactions were the broad range of interactions she used, her ability to deal with many issues at once, her ability to create an atmosphere of anticipation, and her use of sign language.

Rachel prioritised the caring aspect of her role. She stated "*My role, I feel, really is to keep them* [the children] *safe, and happy, and interested.*" This perspective seemed to emanate from the presumptions that the children needed caring to compensate for their "*homes that are incredibly hectic*" (Rachel, exit interview), and "*that there are no rules or boundaries at home*". (Rachel, reflective dialogue)

In the reflective dialogue, when asked what it was that best exemplified her practice, Rachel identified one segment from the SGLE 'hide & seek'. She reflected that the segment:

> *Gave a good impression of how I am normally, the children were all being listened to, they participated in...each other's part of the exercise, it was quite positive, while the children were engaged in a group activity they were also free to...chat to each other and do their own thing as well, and then come back to the activity. It was structured but there was still freedom for them to do their own thing.* (Rachel, reflective dialogue)

Rowan

Rowan had been in operation for eight years at the time of initial data gathering. Rowan was a community childcare setting. Rowan catered for 100 children of a broad age range. The children were referred to the setting by the HSE and families

could self refer. The opening hours for the focus group of children were from 9:30 to 13:00. The curriculum was identified as moving towards HighScope. There were three educators in the focus group room at any one time, all of whom were qualified in ECEC to FETAC Level 5. The setting was supported by a manager and a cook. Within the larger facility there were four rooms dedicated to different age groups of children from babies to older children. There was an accessible garden area furnished with outdoor play equipment, which was used in rotation by the different age groups. There were 15 children, in the age range of three to four years, in the group room. In Rowan a key worker system[8] was in operation. Katie, who was the research participant in Rowan, was responsible for one group of five children. The room where the observations took place was divided into named interest areas: a 'book corner', 'a home corner', a 'block corner,' a 'toy corner', and an 'art area' (see Appendix 5 for a sketch of the room). All the interest areas were appropriately equipped. The equipment was accessible to the children. It was recorded in the research diary that:

> When entering the building a sense of welcome and warmth pervades...This setting is purpose built... My initial impression of the focus room is one of light and spaciousness. As a setting they are beginning to reinvest in HighScope and there was evidence of it, particularly in the interest areas. There were dedicated place mats with children and adult's own symbols, which the children were well used to recognising and distributing at break time. (Research diary, 24.03.2009, Impressions of Rowan)

Katie

At the time of the initial data gathering Katie was twenty six years of age. She was a mother of one child and had been working part-time with children in the research site

[8] The key worker system has come about from the recognised emotional need for stability and continuity in a child's life in order for them to develop holistically. In this system, each child and family in a service is assigned a key worker. As implied in the title, the key worker has a 'special' responsibility for selected children and the relationship with those children's families (French, 2008).

(Rowan) for three years. She had achieved a Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Level 5 Certificate in Childcare and had also participated in a range of training in child protection, first aid and some brief training sessions in the HighScope curriculum approach. She was unable to avail of ongoing training due to the part-time nature of her work and the timing of the training, which regularly occurred during midterm breaks and holidays.

Katie shared her room with fifteen children and two (occasionally three) educators. Katie was observed to be gentle, smiling, friendly and positive. In the mornings it was observed that the majority of the children (not only her own key group) came over to Katie to say hello, climb on her knee, or give (and receive) a hug. During free play, she also tended to be surrounded by the children. She identified that she didn't introduce topics of conversation to the children, instead she responded to them when they approached her for help. Signature features of Katie's interactions were her attentiveness to children and how she was attuned to caring routines and children's needs such as using the toilet. During small group time she was active, regularly leaving to get materials or cloths for cleaning.

Katie reported that her priorities in the setting were "... *to make sure that the children get the most out of their play....*[particularly] *any emotional worries or social problems ... And ... for them to have fun as well; just to support them and help them.*" The rationale from Katie's perspective was that a child "*could be acting out something that he's feeling at home*".

Katie identified that the setting allowed for flexibility. During the reflective dialogues she valued that in the film of the SGLE 'hammering play-dough':

> *You don't have to be restricted to ... 'you can only hammer the playdough today and that's all you can do'...it can evolve onto something else. They made their own fun... and it is quite easy then just to go along with it.* (Katie, reflective dialogue)

Birch

Birch was a new facility in rented accommodation. It had been in operation for only seven months at the time of initial data gathering. It was a voluntary early intervention setting. Birch catered for a total of twelve children in the age range of two and a half to four years of age. The children were referred to the setting by the HSE and families could self refer. The opening hours for the focus group of children were from 8:30 to 13:15. The curriculum was identified as moving towards HighScope. There were three educators in the setting, with varying qualifications in ECEC ranging from FETAC Level 5 (2 educators, one of whom had also completed training in HighScope) to HETAC Level 8. The setting was supported by a manager and a cook. There was a small patio area equipped with outdoor play equipment. In Birch a key worker system was also in operation, where the focus educator was responsible for six children. The room where all the observations took place was divided into interest areas: an art area, a book area, a jigsaw area, a dress up, home corner and shop area, and a construction area (see Appendix 5). On entering the room there was a shelving unit with cubby holes for each child identified by the child's photograph. According to the research diary:

> This is a very new service...The setting is well laid out. The furniture is mainly wooden and very attractive. The room is clearly defined in many interest areas. It is well stocked with a range of materials. Again, the staff are very attentive to the children. (Research diary, 26.03.2009, Impressions of Birch)

Sarah

At the time of the study Sarah was twenty three years of age. She had been working full-time with children in the research site (Birch) for less than one year. She had achieved a HETAC Level 8 Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education the previous year. She had also participated in child protection training, first aid and some cluster group training in HighScope.

Sarah shared her room with twelve children and two practitioners. Sarah was observed to be gentle and calm. During free play Sarah was observed scanning the room and moving to where she was needed while maintaining contact with the child she was with. During this time Sarah was engaged with the children following children's interests and playing in role with the children. She was observed as being the person who organised distribution of the plates and food for breaks and dinner in the setting. Sarah consistently used soft tones when talking to children and rarely raised her voice. She demonstrated clarity in giving directions and following through on issues with children. She was physically affectionate and regularly referred children to each other. She remained stationary for the duration of the SGLEs. Signature features of Sarah's interactions were her focus on politeness, an emphasis on conflict resolution and creating a social environment for the children. She regularly used the words "your friends".

In relation to her priorities in the setting, Sarah reported that she saw her role as *"more the carer role than the teacher role...because of what's going on at home... for some of the families ...they don't have time to sit down with the pre-school child"* (Sarah, exit interview).

In the reflective dialogues, it was a challenge for Sarah to find anything that best exemplified her practice. She had reviewed the films with her staff team and was anxious to discuss how she would interact differently with the children now. When pressed she explained that "*I don't think it was hopeless, I just didn't have the understanding two years ago*". Sarah was at that time a recent graduate and has since undertaken training in HighScope. Sarah reflected that in the SGLE 'shaving foam' experience:

> *There was more freedom to explore and the language that came out was much greater than in the previous film. There was more action, more social interaction and it was easier to follow the children's initiatives or interest. I was ...relaxed and engaged and the language just flowed* and *whereas it wasn't pre-planned, it was good to have the extra materials to extend the engagement of the children.* (Sarah, reflective dialogue)

All three educators appeared to be building the children's autonomy by validating the children's initiatives. Autonomy is one of the competencies and dispositions identified by Kellaghan (2001) as being desirable for children to engage successfully with the educational system and overcome educational inequality. Table 7 below summarises the main similarities and differences between the three settings.

Table 7
Summary Portrait and Analysis of the Three Settings

Similarities	All three settings: • Are situated in urban areas designated as disadvantaged • Provide for the education and care of the children attending the settings • Provide ongoing education and training of staff • Are funded through statutory and/or philanthropic sources • Have a manager and cook • Have in excess of 50% of the children in their care referred to the setting due to speech and language difficulties.		
Setting	Cherry (Rachel)	Rowan (Katie)	Birch (Sarah)
Management	Health Services Executive (HSE)	Community Initiative	Voluntary organisation
Years in operation	52 years	8 years	7 months
Opening hours	9:30– 16:00	9:30 – 13:00	8:30– 13:15
No. of 3-4 yr olds in total	23	15	12
No. of educators total	4	3	3
No. of children in each educator's group	8	5	6
No. in each group room	1 adult, 8 children	3 adults, 15 children	3 adults, 12 children
Enrolment procedure	HSE referral only	HSE & families self refer	HSE & families self refer
Curriculum	Play-based and emergent curriculum	Moving towards the HighScope curriculum	Moving towards the HighScope curriculum

The routines varied in the three settings. Figure 11 depicts the posted daily routines. All elements of the posted routine were observed in the settings with the exception of planning time with children in Rowan, which did not occur during this researcher's visits. Work time refers to the plan-do-review sequence of the HighScope daily routine (Hohman & Weikart, 1995).

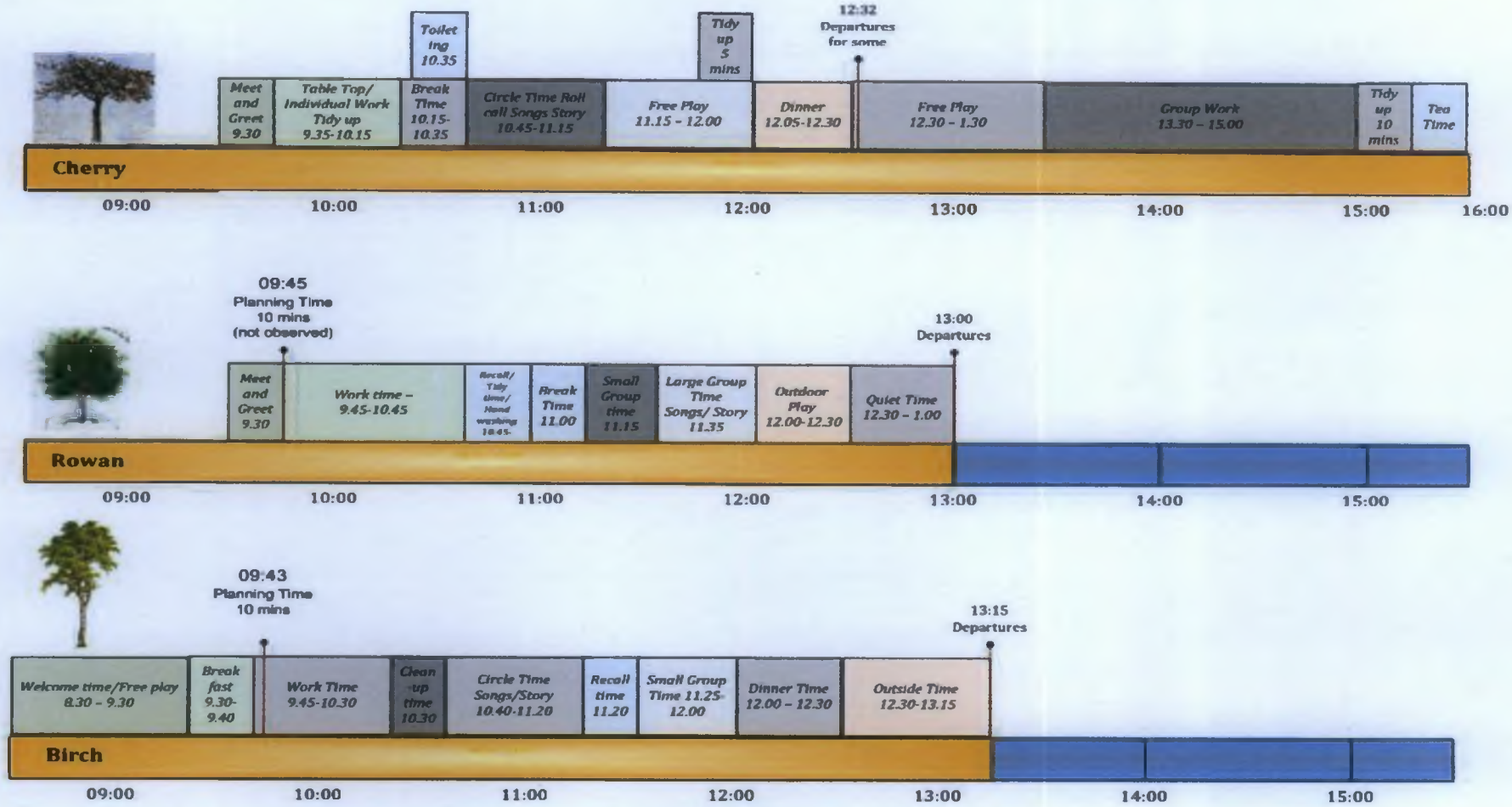

Figure 11 Posted daily routines

In the main, the routines were adhered to particularly in relation to mealtimes. However, there was flexibility observed in all settings regarding children being supported to complete the learning experiences at their own pace.

Table 8 depicts a summary of the three educators (Rachel, Katie and Sarah) within their settings, before presenting the findings in relation to pedagogical organisation.

Table 8
Summary Portrait of the Three Educators

Setting	**Cherry**	**Rowan**	**Birch**
Educator	Rachel	Katie	Sarah
Age	28	26	23
Qualification/Training	Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Level 8 Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education	Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Level 5 Childcare	Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Level 8 Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education
Years experience	3.5	3	Less than 1
Work	Full time	Part time	Full time
Further training	Child protection, first aid, sign language, diversity issues, speech and language programmes and play therapy	Child protection, first aid, limited cluster group training in HighScope	Child protection, first aid, limited cluster group training in HighScope
Availability for training	Yes	No	Yes

Pedagogical Organisation

Pedagogical organisation involves the educators' own stance in relation to their role and identity as educators, some of which was reported in the portraits above. It also involves creating the conditions for children's optimal learning and development through interactions leading to EPCs. The remaining data is presented within the educators' perspective on the importance of interactions, what hinders and what supports interactions and planning for interactions. The data is presented in a consistent order of Rachel (Cherry), Katie (Rowan) and Sarah (Birch).

The Educators' Perspectives of the Importance of Interactions

During the exit interviews the educators were asked, "how important do you think interactions are"? All educators asserted that their interactions were important. However, only Rachel alluded to the educative value of interactions. Rachel stated, "*I think that it's important to have a good language model and a good social model.*" When asked to describe their interaction strategies they identified having "*fun and laughter*" (Rachel) "*just...generally have fun with them*" (Katie) and "*getting down to their level...; speaking clearly ...; directing them to other* [children]" (Sarah). Rachel also spoke about being "*...consistent...talking things through...making children aware of ...how their behaviours might impact on other people.*" Through their descriptions of their interaction strategies it would appear that the three educators prioritised social development.

This was verified in the reflective dialogues, albeit with differing rationales from the three educators. The educators were asked to talk about their priorities in their interactions. Rachel identified that, "*group cohesion, working as part of a team, part of a group and being comfortable in that*" was her priority. She felt that it is necessary to establish this at the beginning of the year, "*as the children have been coming from very difficult situations where there is abuse in the household or parents are drug users*". She reported that, "*I find that once you have that social cohesion, they are comfortable enough with each other to have extended conversations ... So the language and communication comes afterwards*" (Rachel, reflective dialogue). Katie reported that her priorities in the SGLEs were for children to "*enjoy the experience, to enjoy the socialising ... and the interactions with the other children, and to do ... something different*". Her rationale was that the particular group of children she was working with

wouldn't normally play together, so it "*was nice to see them come together*" (Katie, reflective dialogues). Sarah reflected that her priority was for:

> *Children to sit in a group and talk to their peers, having the language, or if not having the language having the communication skills to show their friends what they want or what they don't want, to resolve those conflict themselves.* (Sarah, reflective dialogue)

An analysis of these expressed views suggests that the educators focussed on compensating for perceived deficits in the home lives of the children rather than focussing on interactions. Similar to the teachers in Devine's (2000) study, Rachel, in particular, felt that the children needed to learn self-control and cohere as a group. Whereas the educators identified the importance of interactions, they did not seek to purposefully engage in conversation with children. Consistent with findings reported in Wood (2009), they felt in particular that they should not intervene in children's play and conversations. During the exit interviews Rachel, who had the most training and experience, reflected on the issue: "*I probably could do more, joining in the child's activity and taking part in shared activity. Because I feel sometimes I sit back...I could probably increase my level of interaction with them*". Katie reported, "*... I just sit down and they more or less come and talk to you... if a child is being quiet and is absorbed in their play, well, then I'll leave them be...*". Sarah observed, "*...we'll leave them. ...If you can see them playing away... at the train set or something... and they are playing along fine, you don't need to be there the whole time.*" During the reflective dialogues, having reviewed the videos, and without prompting, two educators expressed disappointment with what they had seen. Rachel said, "*I just talked and talked, and talked and talked...and when I did stop talking the kids talked amongst themselves*" (Rachel, reflective dialogue). Sarah equally expressed disappointment, describing her interactions as "*flighty*". She elaborated, "*I hopped from one child to the next...with no*

real engagement in conversation" (Sarah, reflective dialogue). Both educators stated that their opinion of their performance was coloured by the further training and experience gained in the intervening two years.

What Supports or Hinders Interactions

During the exit interviews the educators were asked, "what do you think helps your interactions with children"? In response some differing views were offered. Rachel referred to learning. She replied, "*time, space, opportunity... It's very much that we* [the early childhood team] *are all on the same page;* [focussing on] *play based emerging themes and learning*". In contrast Katie concluded, "*I think if you really like your job, you'll enjoy interacting with ...kids. ...and actually sitting with them at an activity.*" Sarah identified "*just everyone being calm*" particularly in relation to "*...conflict resolution*" situations with children. Other supports suggested by Sarah included "*having a team member whose role is to 'float'* [to support staff when required], *team support*", having a "*stable staff team*" and having a consistent "*daily routine*".

The educators were asked, "what do you think impedes interactions"? Some common themes emerged in the exit interviews in relation to what hinders interactions and were consistent with the findings from the observations. Rachel identified an "*over-sized group.... inconsistency between staff members if things aren't communicated properly before a session...something wrong with the equipment.*" She also referred to the specific challenges of meeting individual children's special needs: "*One boy in particular...was diagnosed with ADHD and an aggressive nature.*" She identified that when a child "*has very specific requirements within the classroom and there is only one teacher it can be very difficult.*" Rachel, in contrast to Katie and Sarah, held her SGLEs

in a room occupied only by herself and her group of eight children. Katie and Sarah had five and six children respectively in their groups. Katie identified "*interruptions during the day ...*" as hindering her interactions. She commented, "*even at my small group time, I'm constantly coming and going.*" Katie was observed answering the telephone, escorting children to the toilet, signing parents in and being called on to talk to other adults in the room during the SGLEs. Such interruptions must surely have impacted negatively on the creation of opportunities to facilitate children's thinking and language. Katie's solution was to have "*...four staff in the room every day,* [then] *you would get more interactions*". Sarah identified children with "*...speech and language difficulties* and "*just not being prepared ...*" as hindrances to interactions.

A significant number of children in the settings had experienced speech and language delay. The question of the potential impediment of such a condition to a child's ability to engage in conversation cannot be disregarded. The educators were asked in the reflective dialogues if they felt that this was a barrier to conversations. Rachel said, "*it is just as possible to have a conversation*". Rachel went on to recall that in the five years of her practice, there was only one child (not in the study group) who's speech impacted on his ability to engage in conversations: "*He had a stutter and it made it almost impossible for him to communicate*". Rachel then went through each child in the group (on the screen). She concluded, "*At the beginning of the year I often thought it would be an issue, but the children all seem to understand each other*". When asked if Rachel herself found it to be a problem, she said:

> *No, the only thing that I did find a problem was finding the balance between 'caring teacher' and 'speech therapist'.... Because the speech therapist constantly says 'if she says yuck, you say to her yuck? or look?' and correct her in that way. But you ... feel uncomfortable doing that all the time, because you don't want her to think that she can't speak to you without you analysing how she is speaking or changing what she is saying.* (Rachel, reflective dialogue)

Rachel went on to talk about an alternative approach involving planning for conversations: "*We need to plan for stuff the children are going to have fun with and can question and communicate and let it happen naturally*". Katie, when asked if the speech and language difficulties of the children were a barrier to conversation, replied, "*No, no, definitely not ...most kids read off our body language anyway...they are brilliant at it! There were facial expressions and hands on the mouth*" [in the film]. This perspective was shared by Sarah, who replied that speech and language issues "*were not as much of a barrier as you might think. Even with one of the younger boys, he is well able to communicate through gestures, eye contact and body language*". The educators did not appear to regard speech and language difficulties as a barrier to conversations. However, the dilemma faced by Rachel in risking discouragement of conversation is very real (Edwards, 1989; Kellaghan, 2001) and will be discussed in Chapter 6 Relinquishing Control in Conversations with Children.

A further hindrance to interactions that lead to EPCs was revealed by two educators during the reflective dialogues. Both Rachel and Sarah reported a self-imposed objective of creating a 'product' as part of the SGLEs and that as a consequence they were not sufficiently focussed on the 'process' of engaging children in conversations. Rachel referred to the need for "*getting the work done... and there having to be a physical learning outcome*". She also suggested that "*communication and language are not really measurable...at this age you can't really see ... the benefits of ... encouraging communication between teachers and children ... really quickly*". Sarah

reflected that at that time of initial data gathering she thought that SGLEs "*had to be an art activity*". She wanted "*to see an end product...to put a name on and hang up on the wall for parents*". Sarah criticised her own focus on the end product "*rather than the conversation through the process*". Both Rachel and Sarah attributed this to a lack of training.

Another identified impediment to interactions in the reflective dialogues was concerns over practical organisation issues such as "*where am I going to hang these to dry...which can prevent me taking advantage of those naturally occurring conversations or questions*" (Rachel). Similarly, Sarah was concerned "*over the mess and that dinner was on the way*". The children "*were not involved in cleaning up after themselves then, but are now*".

In the reflective dialogues both Rachel and Sarah referred to the issue of trust and their expectations of the children. Rachel stated that in the 'exploring fish' film whilst she had not "*thought through the activity*" other than providing the fish, she had aimed to offer "*experiential learning*" but instead engaged in a process of "*let me tell you about fish*"*!* She said on reflection she "*gave them my ideas rather than trusting that they had their own*". Sarah reflected that she "*talked more then, I talk less now...I'm there to keep the peace sometimes but they* [the children] ... *are so able if you give them the chance, if you stop stressing sometimes, or stop over-thinking about it so much*". Sarah identified that her practice has changed: "*now I'd ask one question and there could be a massive conversation or one child may go over and point at something*". Rachel and Sarah reflected that the children were sufficiently competent and able to undertake their own explorations and make their own discoveries or uses for materials if trusted to do so. This understanding is an important and positive development in the

educators' pedagogical practice as educator expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

An analysis of all the data suggests that these issues were linked to pedagogical organisation and team planning. The number of staff in the room may be less significant than the planning for and evaluation of the SGLEs, the professional preparation of the educators and their skills in interacting with young children. Some of the complex issues surrounding this will be discussed below and in Chapter 6.

Planning for and Evaluation of Interactions and SGLEs

Planning for and Evaluation of Interactions

In response to a question in the exit interviews as to whether the educators had opportunities to plan for and evaluate their interactions with a view to enhancing children's learning and development, Rachel reported that she would "*if there was a specific problem*". She went on to say, "... *I would focus more on their* [the children's] *interactions with each other than how I would respond. I would sit back an awful lot and just let them kind of sort things out*". She acknowledged that planning for interactions was "*probably something I could do an awful lot more of*". Katie reported, "*We don't really think of..., I don't really plan for interactions*". Sarah did not refer to personal reflection of or planning for interactions. Interactions occurred in the settings – it appeared that they just happened. However, the decision-making, careful planning and assessment about how and when to interact to support and extend children's learning, such as that advocated in *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009d), did not appear to feature in the three educators' observed practice or the interviews. Organisational, team and personal planning and evaluation for SGLEs is now presented.

Organisational/institution Planning for and Evaluation of SGLEs

Consistent with the literature on professional practice in relation to learning environments the three settings were spacious, bright, clean and appropriately arranged for children's early learning and development (Epstein, 2007b; CECDE, 2007). A high quality standard of furniture and equipment was evident across the settings. The appropriate resources for SGLEs were available. However, planning for and evaluation of the SGLEs, by the educators' own admission (and evidenced in the observations) was variable in the three settings.

Team/interpersonal Planning for SGLEs

In two of the settings time was allocated weekly for staff meetings. In response to whether Rachel got opportunities to plan for and assess the learning experiences, she explained that once a week *"...we plan out what we're going to do for the week, why we're going to do it, and... what supports we need to put in place for individual children*". The staff in Cherry documented daily records of the success or otherwise of group learning experiences, and referred back to records from previous years for guidance in their planning for future learning experiences.

Katie explained that the team in Rowan meet once a week for formal general planning. As will be illustrated below in the following two examples, it was clear that at that time they had not planned for the delivery of the SGLEs on the days of observation. Sarah reported in the exit interview that the Birch team did not have time as a group to regularly meet and plan regarding the SGLEs. As this was a new setting, their time was devoted to planning room arrangement and generally getting the setting organised. She reported they were looking forward to doing more planning in the future. Regarding planning for learning experiences, she said that sometimes ..."*you just open the press*

and...see what's there. That's the reality... you don't always have the time to plan". This is significant as it suggests a lack of awareness and appreciation of the value of team planning to support children's learning and development in what are relatively well-resourced settings. In the reflective dialogues both Katie and Sarah reported that the setting practices in relation to planning for SGLEs had since changed. Katie is given time within her part-time working hours to evaluate and plan with her team weekly: "*We have planning time now...reflective practice every Friday...so now I can look back and think what could I have done in that activity...we also have* [daily] *planning...before the children come in*". The following two examples drawing from the data in Rowan illustrate the impact of a lack of team planning on interactions at that time.

Example of interruptions: 1.

In Rowan (Katie) the space in which the SGLEs were conducted was shared by three groups. Several incidents were observed where Katie's group were interrupted by children from a second group who were waiting for their key worker to return to the room to begin their SGLE (Observation Log, Day 3 Rowan 'Hammering play-dough'). While waiting they engaged in a vigorous game of 'hide and seek', encouraged by a relief worker. Minimal interaction between Katie and the children was observed during this interruption. It was observed that the children paused in their own learning experiences and looked on. One child wanted to leave. The louder voices of the other group predominated. When the children or Katie did try to talk it was clear that they were having difficulty being heard.

Example of interruptions: 2.

Interruptions also impacted negatively when Katie's small group of children were distracted by "*...the boys who are walking around the room shaking noisy shakers*"

(Transcription Day 4 Rowan 'Making play-dough'). Later on during this learning experience, those same children were attracted by the learning experience conducted by Katie's group. The following is an excerpt from the Observation Log Rowan (see Appendix 13):

> A boy from another group is attracted to the table and questions what's happening. Others join in. Three boys cluster around Mary, fascinated. Katie leaves to get more materials. Boys get called by Educator 2 to return to their own group table, but ignore the request. Educator 2 makes a second call. Katie arrives back with oil. The three boys push each other, knocking things off the shelf. A third call comes for children to join their own group; one boy resists but Educator 2 takes boy by the arm and leads him away - the other boys eventually follow.

This research illustrates that children's learning and development is potentially compromised by a lack of planning. The ongoing interruptions in the early childhood settings were clearly disruptive. The data demonstrates that insufficient thought may have been given to collaborative practice, or how one learning experience conducted by one educator with her group impacted on the others (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

Personal Planning and Implementation for Group Learning Experiences

Rachel was organised regarding the preparation and delivery of her SGLEs. This organisation was demonstrated by having the materials ready and clarity in the delivery of the learning experience. Both Rachel and Sarah remained stationary and focussed on the children during the group learning experiences. In contrast, Katie gathered her materials immediately before and during the SGLEs (Site Visit Notes). During one learning experience Day 1 'Exploring sand and water' which lasted 25 minutes, Katie left the table fourteen times to get aprons, tablecloth, and materials (containers, sand, beakers, water, spoons), replenishing and ultimately removing materials. Such absences

by Katie could indicate an absence of personal planning and preparation for the delivery of the SGLEs.

Summary – Pedagogical Organisation

In summary the findings suggest that in relation to the nature of the pedagogy the settings are organising for events (SGLEs) that would allow for interactions. The educators claimed that interactions were important. However, from the observations, the exit interviews and the reflective dialogues, there appeared to be no value placed on organising for EPCs. In the context of organisation for SGLEs to varying degrees there appeared to be:

- minimal awareness of the importance of using interaction strategies to enhance conversations with a view to developing children's thinking and language;
- minimal understanding and appreciation of, and perhaps, training for SGLEs as a means of enhancing children's thinking and language;
- minimal team planning and evaluation regarding collaboration for and delivery of complementary SGLEs and
- minimal individual planning and evaluation.

Extended purposive conversations between educators and children are unlikely to flourish when they are not considered integral to professional practice. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Interactions

The literature identifies a deficit in research into the value of the interactions in ECEC settings. There is "little information that describes the interactions themselves and in doing so provides rich, detailed descriptions of the moment to moment encounters between teachers and children" (Lobman, 2006, p. 456). In this research, six SGLEs conducted by the three educators were observed, recorded, transcribed and subjected to line-by-line analysis (see Appendix 14 Observation Logs; Appendix 15 Group Learning experiences Vignettes; Appendix 19 Broad Analysis of the Learning Experiences), whereby every element of the interactions was given descriptor codes. The line-by-line analysis painted a detailed portrait of each educator's interactions. There was a remarkable consistency between the educators in relation to the proportion of interactions within each descriptor code. Figure 12 below illustrates this consistency and identifies the descriptor codes in each of the three cases.

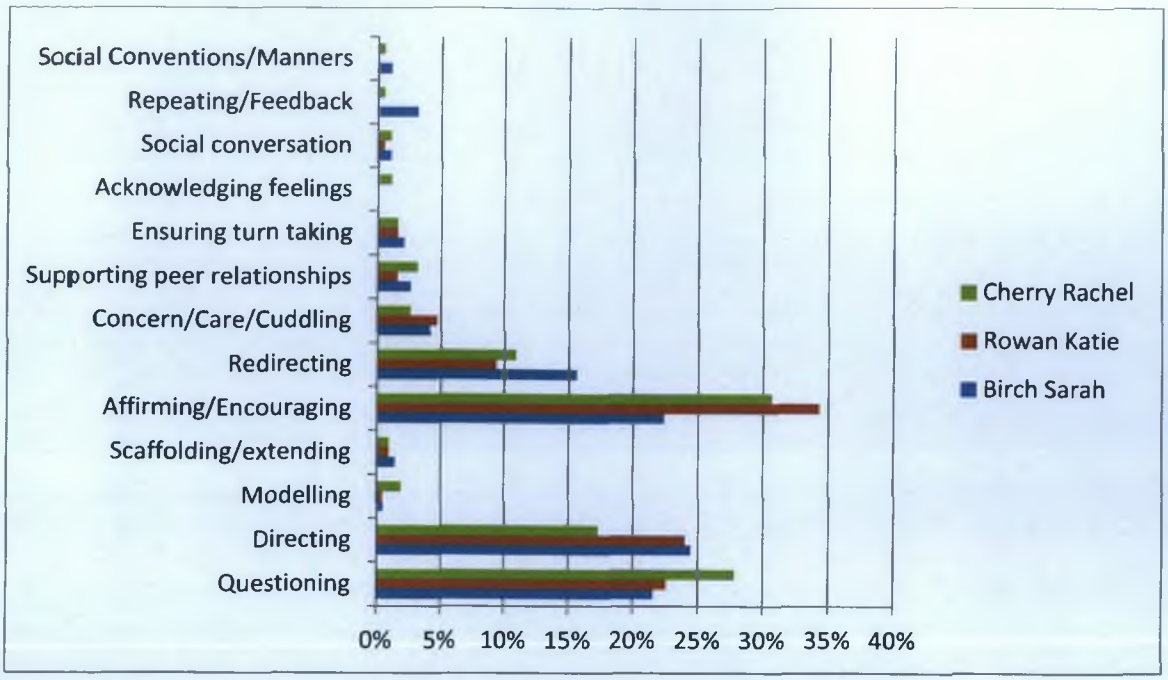

Figure 12 Interactions in the six SGLEs by case

Figure 13 below demonstrates the same findings aggregated for the three educators.

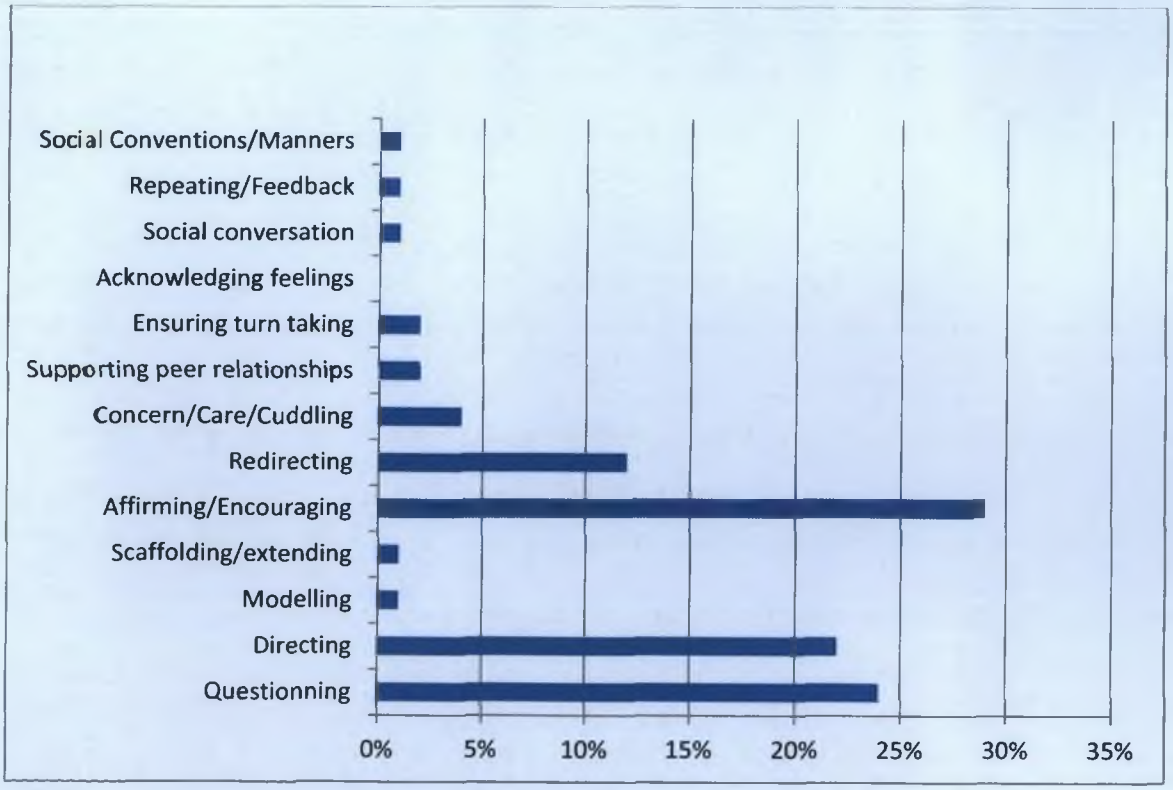

Figure 13 Aggregated interactions in six SGLEs across cases

The following section presents the line-by-line analysis of the nature of each educator's interactions in two SGLEs. The focus of this analysis is on the strategies that represented the greatest proportion of the educators' interactions. They are presented using the same descriptor codes identified in Figures 12 and 13 above, in the order of the most frequent to the least frequent interactions (see Chapter 3 & Appendix 18 Excel Codes for an explanation of the descriptors).

Affirming/Encouraging

A supportive interpersonal environment enables children to feel sufficiently confident and secure to engage in challenging experiences (NCCA, 2009b). The findings indicate that one strategy adopted by the educators to create such an environment was analysed as affirming/encouraging. Affirming/encouraging refers to how educators demonstrated warmth through smiles and general approval. They accepted and commented on what the children said and did. Approximately half of the three educators' affirming/encouraging interactions were analysed to be accompanied by responsiveness and sensitivity. One third of both Rachel's (31%), and Katie's (34%) and one fifth of Sarah's (22%) interactions were analysed to be affirming/encouraging for example:

Rachel:	[To Seamus, smiling.] *That's a lovely way to carry your chair, good job!* (C2Mon)
Katie:	*Frederick, you're doing a great job at washing the animals, aren't you?* (R2Was)
Sarah:	[To Suzie.] *Ah, you got it Suzie.* [Suzie had successfully threaded a bead onto the string.] (B1Nec)

Questioning

Questioning was used initially as a single descriptor code. The literature indicates that questions may be of many forms. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2008a) conducted extensive analysis of the forms of questions which were identified in the early childhood settings in the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Using the labelling of questions from that study the material from the descriptor code 'questioning' was analysed further and the results of that analysis are given in Figure 14 (see also Appendix 18 Excel Codes). Open-ended questioning was identified as an element of conversation which enhances children's thinking and language (Siraj-Blatchford et al.). Closed questions elicit answers which do not promote EPCs. The data indicated that a high proportion of the educators' questions were analysed to be closed questions. Figure 14 below illustrates the detail of the analysis of the questioning interactions that the educators employed. Furthermore, detail on the proportion of the different forms of questioning is provided.

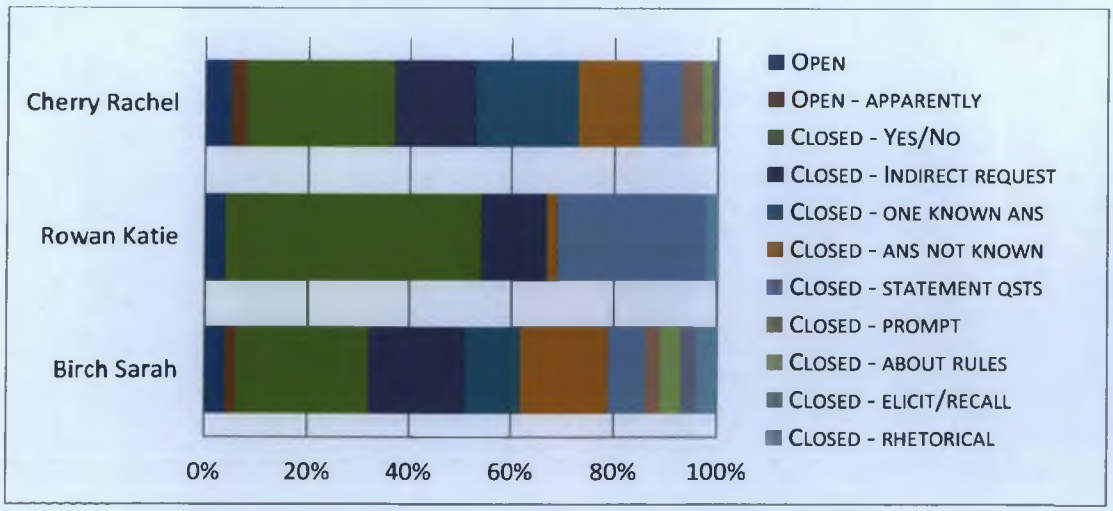

Figure 14 Analysis of questioning interactions in six SGLEs

Closed-ended questions

Approximately a quarter of Rachel's (29%) and Sarah's (26%), and half of Katie's (50%) questions were analysed as Closed - Yes/No. These are questions which elicited a yes or no response from the children.

Example: Closed - yes/no response.

Jack:	*It's a bull! It's a bull!*
Rachel:	*It's a bull? Did you see a bull when you went on the farm the last day?*
Jack:	*Yeah.* (C2Mon)

The interchange demonstrated Rachel's affirmation and responsiveness, but was also analysed as providing low cognitive challenge (Durden & Dangel 2008; Massey 2004)[9]. The conversation did not progress as Rachel immediately turned her attention to another child.

Example: Closed - yes/no response.

Katie:	[To all children.] *Do you want more sand to see what happens*?
Mary:	*Yeah...*
Jake:	[Offers a spoon of sand mixture to Katie.] *Eat this!* [Katie pretends to eat it, Jake seems satisfied.]
Katie:	*Is it hot?*
Jake:	[Shakes his head.] (R1S&W)

This excerpt was analysed as containing closed-ended questions. It was further analysed to contain little cognitive challenge (Durden & Dangel, 2008; Massey, 2004). The potential of the original question "do you want more sand to *see what happens*" was unrealised. It was also analysed as a missed opportunity. The children were not asked to evaluate what happened when they added more sand to their mixtures, or

[9] The degree of cognitive challenge, analysed based on the work of Massey (2004) and Durden and Dangel (2008), ranged from low (labelling objects, yes/no responses, locating objects), to medium (describing, recalling, prompting, elaborating), to high (problem-solving, comparing, predicting, evaluating).

expected to engage in problem solving, or to think and talk about what they were doing or planning. Similarly, Jake offers a limited response to '*is it hot*?' Jake's thinking was not extended to talk about his exploration of sand or what food he was offering. Missed opportunities such as these are particularly significant for children in settings in areas designated as disadvantaged. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 these children have a tendency to have lesser spoken language skills than children reared in wealthier circumstances (Locke, Ginsberg & Peers, 2002). Furthermore, language competence and success in school are positively correlated (Hart & Risley, 1995; Riley et al., 2004). Research in Ireland has highlighted the importance of children developing oral language in these areas (Cregan, 2008). See Chapter 6 Professional Preparation for further discussion.

Example: Closed - yes/no response.
Sarah: *Are you ready to put them on your necklace; your jewels* [Beads.] *to make a necklace?* [Suzie nods her head.] (B1Nec)

This question was repeated many times to all the children at the table with some variation. The nature of this learning experience and its relationship to the conversations will be discussed later in this chapter in The Content and Conduct of the Learning Experiences.

Further examples of closed questions are given below taking one example from each educator. These questions again provided little cognitive challenge (Adams et al., 2004; Durden & Dangel, 2008; Massey, 2004). The first example consists of those where the educator asked a question to which there is only one answer. Approximately one fifth of Rachel's questions (20%) were analysed as Closed - one known answer.

Example: Closed - one known answer.
Rachel: *Where is the bowl of fruit?*
Children: *Under the table!*
Rachel: *You guys are so clever!* (C1Bob)

In this excerpt Rachel was focussed on the learning experience of naming prepositions. She affirmed children's responses and moved quickly on to show the next identification card.

Approximately one third of Katie's questions (29%) were analysed as closed questions: statement questions, many of which did not offer cognitive challenge.

Example: Closed - statement question.
Katie: *Oh, it's very messy, isn't it?* [No response.] (R1S&W)

Approximately one sixth of Sarah's questions (17%) were analysed as closed questions: answer not known in the two group learning experiences.

Example: Closed - answer not known.
Sarah: *Amy? Where are you going on your picnic?*
Amy: [Amy smiles and moves from side to side.]
Sarah: *Who's coming with you?*
Amy: *My uncle.* (B2PD)

Less than a sixth of Rachel's and Katie's questions (16% and 13% respectively) and approximately one fifth of Sarah's questions (19%) were analysed as closed-ended questions labelled as an indirect request or pseudo choice (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). Pseudo choice refers to when a question is asked as if there was a choice, when in reality there is no choice. It is a request, albeit an indirect request.

Example: Closed - indirect request.

Rachel: *Now, Evelyn, can you bring your chair to the rectangle table over there please?* [Evelyn complies.] (C2Mon)

Katie: *Would you like to go to large group, Annaliese*? (R1S&W)

Sarah: *And can you pass it on to your friend Amy?* [Tony passes the bowl to Amy who spoons the flour out quickly three times.] (B2PD)

These closed-ended questions were coded as providing low cognitive challenge and in some cases were also coded as missed opportunities. There was no extension in the conversation. The conversations were adult-directed and controlled. This raises questions about the value educators place on children's conversational contributions and educators' conceptualisation of children (Devine, 2000; Rinaldi, 2006).

Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are regarded as the most significant forms of questioning leading to EPCs (see Chapter 3). Consistent with Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) incidents of this form of questioning was low. This warrants examining the open-ended questions from each educator. Approximately 5% of Rachel's questions were analysed as open-ended. The majority of Rachel's open-ended questions were 'what' or 'why' questions, for example:

Rachel:	*Or is he frustrated?* [Makes motion with her hands like wringing out a towel.]
Seamus:	*Frustrated* [Less emphatically, playing with Bob. Seamus puts his hand under the table, all the children duck under the table to follow Bob, much chatter.]
Rachel:	*And why do you think he'd feel like that?* [Children continue talking to each other.]
Terry:	[Coming up from under the table.] *Bob's angry!*
Rachel:	[To Finbar.] *Have you got a question for Bob? What are you going to ask him?... Ooops!* [Bob fell off Finbar's hand.].
Finbar:	[To Evelyn.] *What's your name?* [No response from Evelyn.]
Rachel:	*What's your name, he's asking!* [Bob falls off Finbar's fingers again. No response from Evelyn.]
Rachel:	[To Finbar.] *I think... I think Evelyn's face looks a little grumpy.* [Whispers something to Finbar, who holds out Bob to Evelyn, smiling. Rachel puts her arms around Finbar and her hands over his and says in a Bob-voice to Evelyn.] What's wrong?
Stephen:	*I think we need Andy Angry.* [Andy Angry is a stress ball that children are encouraged to squeeze when they are angry.]
Rachel:	*Do you think we need Andy Angry? Do we?* [Looking at Evelyn.] *Do you want to go and get him from the Lily room?* [Evelyn nods her head and gets up and moves around the table.] (C1Bob)

This example demonstrates two characteristics of Rachel's interactions. Rachel concentrates on allowing children to name and express their emotions. Terry responded using another 'feeling' word. In the next instant Rachel demonstrates a second characteristic of her interactions: maintaining conversational control. Rachel took control of the conversation and addressed Finbar. At this point the children had been at the table for almost 32 minutes and were becoming restless, yet remained engaged in the conversation. Rachel interpreted that Evelyn seemed cross, possibly because she had waited a long time for her turn. Rachel's whisper to Finbar results in Finbar offering Bob to Evelyn. Rachel shifts into a more dramatic role, becoming Bob for a moment, asking the open-ended question, "what's wrong"? Stephen interpreted Evelyn's emotional state as angry and made the suggestions to get the stress ball, which Rachel supported. The unwillingness to relinquish control in conversations was confirmed by Rachel in the reflective dialogues. Rachel referred to the children's family background

and "*that there does have to be that element of, as much as I hate to say it, control. You do have to unify them as a group first*". This raises further questions about the educators' views of children and their families being possibly grounded in a deficit model of understanding of educational inequality and disregard for children's agency (Divine, 2000).

In Katie's case the 4% of the questions analysed as open-ended questions, significantly, represented just *two* questions. Both questions are worthy of further analysis as they are contained within one of the few focussed conversations Katie had with the children. Both open-ended questions (in bold) occurred in the first learning experience exploring sand and water.

Katie:	*Now...* [Katie crouches down in between Annaliese and Frederick.] ***Now, let's see what happens when you mix it around a bit? Huh? Is it like muck? What about when you put your finger in?*** [Katie dips her finger into Frederick's sand mixture, slowly swirls it in the mixture, raises it up high and lets the sand "plop" back into the container, and repeats the activity and gives a laugh. Children watch closely.].
Annaliese:	*You will have to wash your hands!*
Katie:	*I will have to wash my hands, but it's ok though.* [She dips her finger in Annaliese's, Annaliese watches intently. Katie smiles at everyone. Frederick does the same to his own mixture.]
Katie:	[Katie moves back to her own seat beside Jake.]
Annaliese:	[Annaliese balances her container on top of her water cup.] *Oh!*
Frederick:	[Shouting.] *No, Annaliese, don't!!!* [Annaliese puts the container down.]
Katie:	[To Jake.] ***What's this?*** [She puts her finger in and stirs Jakes' mixture while Jake looks and smiles.]
Jake:	*Oh look at me hand...* [Jake has difficulty pronouncing s and may have meant sand. Katie then offers to get more sand and leaves.] (R1S&W)

Katie had made sure to go around to each child in their exploration of the sand and water. Through her modelling and playful support she encouraged the children to dip their fingers into the sand and water mix. She responded to, accepted and affirmed Annaliese's advice on Katie washing her hands. She demonstrated warmth and interest.

She remained calm at Annaliese's potential dropping of the container and Annaliese sorted it out herself. This episode was characterised by little conversation but a lot of concentration and joint engagement (Schaffer, 1996). However, this example was also coded as medium potential for a cognitive challenge (Durden & Dangel, 2008) but with no follow through. Katie made the statement "is it like muck?" without letting the children formulate their own thoughts about what it was like. There was no evidence of children's ideas being stimulated or developed. Katie did use words like 'wet' and 'dry' in other segments of this learning experience. The focus on "muck" and elsewhere "messy" was limited. As discussed earlier for children living with poverty, a focus on increasing their linguistic repertoire is essential (Edwards, 1989). The purpose of which is to achieve educational equality through giving children a good start to succeeding at school.

The findings indicated that in Sarah's case approximately 4% of the questions were also analysed as **open-ended questions**, for example:

Sarah:	[Sarah is facing Rory who holds up some play-dough to her.] ***What's that?***
Rory:	*An ear.*
Sarah:	*We'll need another ear. How many ears do you have?*
Sarah:	*Two whole ears and spiky hair!*

Sarah began with an open-ended question which had the potential for cognitive challenge. Sarah accepted Rory's response and suggested, "We'll need another ear". Sarah does not wait for a response to her follow up closed-ended question and answered the question herself. This was also coded as a missed opportunity. Sarah did not encourage Rory to talk about, or describe what or who he was making. The analysis of the data suggests that the vocabulary was limited, the extension of ideas was limited and there was no focus on children's thinking. The open-ended questions did not appear to lead to EPCs or development of children's thinking or language.

Directing

More than one sixth of Rachel's (17%) interactions and one quarter of both Katie's (24%) and Sarah's (24%) were analysed to be based on directing. Directing interactions refer to those where the educator gave a directive with which the child was expected to comply (Flanders, 1970). The analysis of data on interactions coded as directions, in the main, revealed that the directions did not lead to further conversation which facilitated or directed children's thinking. Figure 15 presents the full range of the educators' directing interactions.

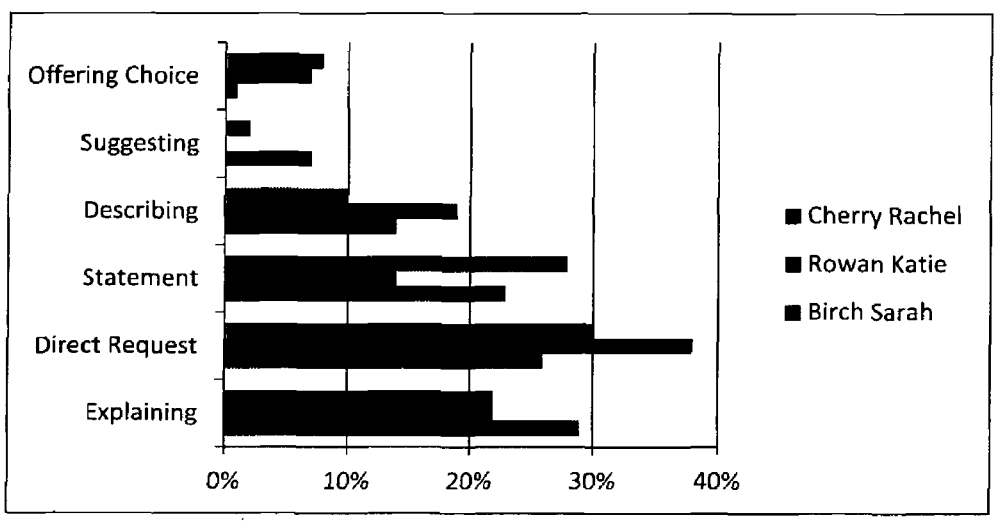

Figure 15 Analysis of directing interactions in six SGLEs

Rachel's 'direct requests' tended to be about "*put your ears on*", "*take turns*", getting materials and so on. Examples of Rachel's 'statements' included "*no, it's not rice*" and "*dinner is in about 20 minutes*". Examples of Rachel's 'explaining' interactions include "*Because we need to use those glue sticks again*" and "*If we shake that all over the table there won't be any left for the next boys and girls who want to use it*".

The majority of Katie's directing interactions were in the form of 'direct request' (38%) and 'explaining' (22%). Katie requested children "*to tidy*", "*finish your cracker*" or to put items in "*the bin*". The content of her directing interactions, focussed on keeping the environment or children tidy.

The majority of Sarah's directing interactions were in the form of 'explaining' (28%) and tended to be about safety, for example, not climbing on shelves, or throwing a scissors or not putting beads in one's mouth because "*it's very dangerous*". She also explained her rationale for her directions for example, "*I'm afraid that they* [the beads] *are going to spill on the ground*". She anticipated potential conflict, for example she explained to Megan, "*James is sitting there. When James is coming back he might want to sit there again*". Sarah's direct requests (26%) mainly revolved around the focus learning experience and "*Use your inside voice*". Sarah's directing with a statement consisted of statements such as: "... *you have the same colour; you both have red*".

In the analysis it appeared that the directing interactions did not lead to enhancement of children's thinking or language, as evidenced by a lack of engagement in any discussion or further conversation.

Redirecting

Redirecting, in the context of this research, was what is traditionally known as reprimanding, managing or censuring behaviour. The term redirecting was adopted as what was observed in the settings could not be described as reprimanding. Instead the educators were observed to be consistently striving to promote collaborative behaviour among the children. Approximately one tenth of both Rachel's (11%) and Katie's (9%) and one sixth of Sarah's (16%) total interactions were analysed as redirecting. This

emphasis on redirecting fits with Sarah's overarching concern with child management issues. An example of redirecting was:

> Rachel: [In response to Evelyn who wanted to begin playing with a toy at tidy up time.] *No, it's just book time Evelyn, until dinner, because there's a lot of tidying up to do and there's no room on the tables.* (C2Mon)

Katie was observed as being consistently positive. When she did have to redirect a child she did so gently and either gave an explanation or was brief and firm as evidenced below. For example:

> Katie: [Turns to Jake who is about to pour the water over the table and onto himself rather than into the beaker and says gently...] *Now, don't pour it there, you'll spill it on yourself* [Katie then helps him pour the water into the beaker.]. (R1S&W)

In common with Katie, a key characteristic of Sarah's redirecting interactions was her clarity in explanations. In this instance children wanted to leave the table but others were having their hands washed and there was no room for Sarah's group at the sink.

> Sarah: *We have to wait for our friends to be finished at the sink. Just wait for a few minutes.*
> Sarah: [Rory stands up to leave. Sarah puts her hand on his arm.] *Just wait for few minutes. Can you make.. emmm...well we have pizzas. Did you put the pizzas in the oven?*
> Rory: *No!* [He sat down and returned his attention to his pizza.] (B2PD)

Sarah clearly articulated why children couldn't leave. She also thought to extend the learning experience in hand which maintained Rory's attention and prevented him from leaving.

Remaining Interactions

A small portion (3%) of Rachel's interactions were analysed to be about supporting peer relations. Supporting peer relationships involved Rachel referring one child to another to develop mutual support amongst children, for example:

> Rachel: [To Jack and Betsy] *Do you two want to help each other because you both put them* [aprons] *on the same way.* [They close each other's aprons.] (C2Mon)

The next most common interactions portrayed by Katie and Sarah were analysed to be about demonstrating concern, physical care regarding hygiene or meeting toiletry needs and giving or receiving cuddles. They constituted about one twentieth of Katie's (5%) and Sarah's (4%) interactions. For example:

Katie : [To Chris.] *Would you like to dry the animals then*?
Chris: *No!* [Chris shakes his head again. He stays by the table looking on. Eventually he leans on Katie's leg. She puts her arm around him and lifts him up onto her knee.] (R2Was)

Katie demonstrated warmth through regular smiles and hugs and accepted and commented positively on what the children said and did. In the following illustration, Sarah characteristically explains the problem. Luke had put his necklace on tightly

Sarah: *Careful of your neck; Careful.* [Sarah touches Luke's neck.] *That's too tight. That's going to hurt your neck.* (B1Nec)

The remaining descriptors are self-explanatory and constituted a smaller proportion of the educators' interactions (see Figure 12 above for a summary, and Chapter 3 and Appendix 18 Excel Codes for an explanation of the descriptors). Supporting peer relationships, ensuring turn taking, acknowledging feelings and social conventions/manners were new categories which emerged from the analysis and were added to the original descriptors (see Appendix 6 ECICS for original coding schedule). 'Social conventions/Manners' was added to the original schedule as this was a small but consistent feature of both Rachel and Sarah's relationship building interactions. For example:

Rachel: ...so if you need something, what do you think would be a good idea to say?
Chorus: Please...
Rachel: Please, yeah that's a great idea. Or can you pass that to me please? Can you pass me the coconut, please? Or can you pass me the cotton wool, please? Or you could call over to somebody and say, [to Tori] are you finished? Can I take some of those please? [turning back to all the children] wouldn't that be a nice idea? Ok, so we need to get some glue, don't we? (C2Mon)

This will be discussed in the context of the priorities educators place regarding the focus of their interactions and the class-related nature of that focus (Bourdieu, 1986) in *Chapter 6.* A significant feature of EPCs that is not included in the line-by-line analysis, but is presented here, is active listening.

Active Listening

A 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2005) is identified as key to effective relationships. It could also be seen as an intrinsic part of a 'pedagogy of conversation' (Alexander, 2008). In the excerpt below Sarah demonstrated listening to children.

Amy:	*Look what I'm making.*
Sarah:	*What did you make Amy?* [Sarah gives the scissors back to James.]
Amy:	*Pizza.*
Sarah:	*Mmm, what's on your pizza?*
Amy:	*Butter, butter.*
James:	*Sticky, sticky*
Tony:	*I made a train pizza.* [Tony rolls the dough into a sausage shape and holds it to his mouth.]
Sarah:	*A train pizza, mmmmm.* [Sarah makes an expression that suggests that it is delicious.]
Rory:	*Pepperoni.*
Sarah:	*I love pepperoni.*
Amy:	*I love pepperoni.* (B2PD)

The positive relationships that Sarah had developed with the children were evident and Sarah kept the conversation going. However, active listening involves not just listening to what children are saying, but also understanding children's meaning and expanding and extending it (Wells, 1985a). Furthermore, it involves co-construction (Jordan, 2009), underpinned by intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1980). In both of these examples there was evidence of engagement, but not of development in thinking or language through conversation.

In the following excerpt the children were engaged in making play-dough.

Sarah:	*Water.* [Sarah reaches below the table and lifts up a beaker of water.] ..*Watching?*
Tony:	*Can I do it as well?* [Sarah pours the water into the bowl.]
Sarah:	*What else goes in there as well?*
Tony:	*Let meee. Let meee.* [James is leaning across Suzie to look into the bowl. Sarah touches James's shoulder.]
Sarah:	*Can you sit down please so everyone can see?* [Sarah places the bowl in front of Rory and shakes in a small amount more flour. Sarah holds the bowl.]
Sarah:	*Now will you stir it around.* (B2PD)

Sarah doesn't respond to Tony's request. She may not have heard it or chose to ignore it. In either case she poured the water in herself. She then asks for the children's opinion as to what else is needed. She gently redirects James with an explanation. She does not return to ask the children what was required from their previous experience of making play-dough. The above example was early on in the learning experience, but children were not challenged to contribute their ideas on making play-dough. Opportunities to develop intersubjectivity and extend the conversation did not appear to be availed of. Sarah effectively responds to her own question.

Summary –Interactions

The three educators presented as calm, sensitive and responsive to all of the children in their care. They focused on building strong, caring and reciprocal interpersonal relationships with them. Such positive relationships seemed to provide the children with a secure foundation enabling them to focus on their learning experiences without apparent anxiety or fear of reprimand. The educators demonstrated warmth, physical affection and empathy. All three affirmed and encouraged children regularly. Katie gently redirected children's inappropriate actions. Both Rachel and Sarah were skilled at specifying children's expected behaviour while also offering clear

explanations as to why certain behaviours were not appropriate. They both focussed on enabling collaborative behaviours and social relationships, such as teamwork, amongst the children.

Looking across the data in relation to the three educators, one common thread appeared to be little emphasis on engagement in purposive conversations designed to develop children's thinking and language. This is evidenced by the few open-ended questions. While acknowledging the brief time of data gathering, few of the interactions analysed were in relation to scaffolding and modelling in the SGLEs. The emphasis placed on relationship-building reflects the values as stated by the educators. Both Rachel and Sarah had received further in-service training in the intervening two years leading up to the reflective dialogues. Both identified a shift in practice towards more conversation, having reviewed the films. This raises serious questions about whether there is sufficient emphasis on strategies to extend conversations in educators' initial training. EPCs between educators and children are critical for the development of language and thinking for all children but particularly those in the focus settings (Cregan, 2008; Tough, 1977). These questions will be addressed in Chapter 6.

The Content and Delivery of the Learning Experiences

This section presents the findings on the content and delivery of the 12 scheduled SGLEs across the three settings. As can be seen from Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes, the educators offered a range of learning experiences. The learning experiences were scheduled, initiated and directed in all three settings. Consistent with Durden and Dangel (2008), children were encouraged but were not required to participate if they did not want to. The children either remained with the group and engaged in different learning experiences (Day 2 Cherry; Day 1, 2 and 4

Rowan; Day 2 Birch) or finished quickly and left the group (Day 1 Birch). There were interruptions to at least two of the learning experiences in each of the three settings. As presented earlier in Pedagogical Organisation, these interruptions varied in relations to the degree of interruption and the impact on the educators' interactions with children.

Regarding the stability of the children's group composition and location, in Cherry and in Rowan the same group of children met daily in the same location for the scheduled SGLEs, consistent with professional practice (Epstein, 2007b; Epstein, Gainsley, Lockheart, Marshall, Neill & Rush, 2009). In Birch the system was that educators changed groups every fortnight. During Day 1 and Day 2, Sarah conducted small group time with six children who were the oldest of the 12 in the setting; whereas in Day 3 and Day 4, she was joined by a second educator and conducted SGLEs with the youngest six children. An unchanging group of children allows for regular peer contacts. The lack of group stability in conducting SGLEs may prevent the educator from getting to know the children well, having opportunities to enable children to support each other, and to practice interaction strategies (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995). It is to be acknowledged that in the reflective dialogue Sarah reported that the practice has changed. Sarah finds a new arrangement of working with a consistent key group of children is more satisfactory for the development of conversation in the SGLEs.

This section considers whether the content and delivery of the learning experiences impacted on the nature of the pedagogy, in particular the potential for EPCs. This will be explored in relation to the findings within: (a) the proportion of the interactions characterised by episodes of conversations and the degree of cognitive challenge, (b) the nature of the learning experiences and the materials themselves, and (c) the process of delivering the SGLEs.

Episodes of Conversations and Cognitive Challenge

In relation to the proportion of the interactions characterised by episodes of conversations, the line-by-line analysis of six of the learning experiences across the three settings revealed that more than a third (38.6%) of the total interactions between educators and children were in episodes of conversations. Episodes of conversations in this context referred to streams of conversations of 'initiation, response, feedback' (drawing from Alexander, 2008) between the adult and child. Consistent with Smith (1999) the criteria that applied here was that the adult had to take two turns with both adult and child sharing a focus on a topic/learning experience. The distribution of the interactions characterised by episodes of conversations across the six SGLEs is represented in Figure 16.

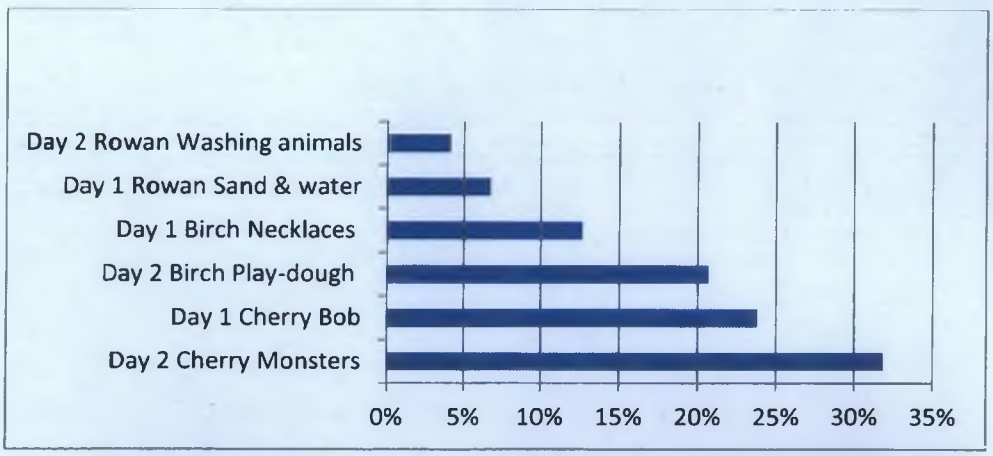

Figure 16 Analysis of episodes of conversations in six learning experiences

During these SGLEs the educators were succeeding in sustaining 'initiation, response, feedback' conversations. The majority of the episodes were in Cherry (Rachel, more than a half), one third in Birch (Sarah) and one tenth in Rowan (Katie). However, the impact of those conversations in terms of enhancing children's thinking appeared to be limited. If the overall content of those sustained episodes are considered,

they focussed on affirming, labelling, child management issues such as settling disputes, and safety.

As can be seen from Figure 16, across the settings, there was an increase in the number of extended conversations in the open-ended learning experiences (see Appendix 14 Observation Logs and Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes and Appendix 18 Broad Analysis of the Learning Experiences). For example, taking one case, there was evidence of episodes of conversations in the open-ended SGLE on Day 2 Birch Making play-dough (approximately 20%). In contrast, in the closed-ended SGLE on Day 1 Birch Making necklaces, there were fewer episodes of conversations (approximately 12%). This could be related to the nature of the learning experience which, as enacted or proposed to the children, appeared to be relatively restricted. The potential for pattern-making, or discussion on shape, was not exploited. The degree of cognitive challenge was analysed as low. Sarah mentioned the colour of the string, "*diamonds*" and "*jewels*" "*pink hearts*" but it was one of the children who asked Sarah:

James: *What ones do you like?* (B1Nec)

The majority of Sarah's questions (approximately 66%) yielded a yes/no response in this learning experience. The most prolonged episodes centred on four disagreements. The two children who were part of the disputes left the learning experience, perhaps because it did not engage them. This finding perhaps vindicates Sarah's own concerns about the need for a focus on behaviour management. However, it could be argued that since Sarah was recently graduated she did not have sufficient skill or experience to engage the children and to exploit the potential of the experience. This was confirmed in the reflective dialogue and has implications for the priorities that may exist in educator professional preparation.

All of the 12 learning experiences appeared to be at the children's current level of development. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that adults should interact with children within the zone of proximal development to help realise their potential development, rather than their actual developmental level. It follows that the learning experiences on offer should contain elements of challenge such as problem-solving opportunities. Acquiring a habitus of dispositions of enquiry and competencies in problem-solving could be particularly important to enable the focus children to engage more successfully in schools (Bourdieu, 1973; Kellaghan, 2001).

The following account of approaches taken by two different educators to the same learning experience illustrates the lack of problem-solving and cognitive challenge resulting from the educators' interactions. The following is from the Transcription Day 4 Rowan 'Making play-dough'.

Katie:	*Now sit down everyone and I'll get your bowls and your stuff to make your play-dough, ok? All right honey?*
Mary:	[Sings to Chris with her arm in the air.] *Play doooough.*
Katie:	[Katie returns with materials, oil, colouring and bowls. Annaliese moves to take the oil.] *Annaliese, don't touch that yet. Now, everybody can do their own, ok?*

Katie did not articulate the purpose of the learning experience, the materials to be used, or suggestions for how usable play-dough could be made. Katie gave each child the materials (flour, water, oil and red food colouring). She gave some guidance on the amount of flour to use to begin with as follows:

Katie:	*Now,* [To Jake.] *Jake, take two big spoonfuls of flour and put them in there. Look! Two big spoonfuls. Very good.* [Katie takes the spoon from Jake and gives it to Annaliese.]

She told them the materials to use. She did not demonstrate making play-dough herself, or caution them when they added too much water. In the reflective dialogue

Katie identified, unprompted, that "*I should have done the activity with them rather than just sitting back*". There was no conversation as to how the children thought the mixture could be made solid, or the different consistencies of play-dough that were created and they ran out of flour. A boy from a neighbouring table, who came over to observe what was going on, creatively identified that they had made red liquid "*tomato soups*" (Transcription Day 4 Rowan 'Making play-dough'). However, this theme of 'soup' was not exploited by either Katie or the children in the SGLE. The children continued swirling the liquid in the containers. Although the children enjoyed the process, the objective of making play-dough was not realised. There appeared to be no new learning for the children in the SGLE. There was little cognitive challenge in the experience and the children's thinking was not extended. The learning experience ended with Katie mopping up the spills, getting the readymade play-dough for the children to play with and finally leaving for her break.

In contrast, in Day 2 Birch during the SGLE 'Making and playing with play-dough' Sarah dominated the making of the dough. She passed a bowl around and allowed the children to spoon prescribed amounts of flour into the bowl, but she controlled the amount of water. She passed the bowl around again and the children stirred the dough. She also ran out of flour but got some more from a neighbouring table (and didn't leave her chair). She talked about making the dough, and finalised making it herself. The children went on to play with the dough. There appeared to be no extension to the children's thinking or language.

Neither approach fulfilled the potential of the learning experience of *making* play-dough to support children to solve-problems, to be reflective, creative, or resourceful. In the SGLEs, it appeared that the children in the main were engaged and co-operating but

they may not have been challenged in their thinking or have learnt new language. In the 12 learning experiences it appeared that the opportunities for challenge that did present themselves were not fully exploited. Whereas strategies such as scaffolding, modelling and co-construction were observed during free-play (see Appendix 4 Field Report, initial findings, for an example), there appeared to be an absence of the use of such pedagogical strategies in the SGLEs. In order to realise the potential that scheduled SGLEs offer for EPCs educators must first be aware of that potential and have skills in the delivery of the learning experiences to contribute to children's learning and development. This is a key finding and is particularly significant in the context of settings in areas designated as disadvantaged in relation to children's language skills (Cregan, 2008). From a socio-cultural perspective language provides the process and product of the cognitively focussed interactions (Fleer, 1995). From a cultural reproduction perspective, language is more than a method of communication, depending on the amount of vocabulary it enables one to manipulate and interpret complex logical structures (Bourdieu, 1986). Such competencies are valued in schools. Furthermore, there are compelling arguments that oral language is directly linked to later literacy (Eivers, Sheil, Perkins & Cosgrave, 2005; Hart & Risley, 1995). The next section considers the nature of the learning experiences and the materials themselves.

The Nature of the Learning Experiences and the Materials

Children require learning experiences that matter to them to enable their passion for learning. Ideally, these experiences will be fuelled by provocative questions and 'big ideas' (Rich & Drummond, 2006). Table 9 outlines the content and brief analysis of the learning experiences. The analysis centred on whether the learning experiences were open-ended or adult-directed, whether new words (vocabulary) were introduced and

whether 'first-hand-experiences' (Rich et al., 2005) were offered (see Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes and Appendix 19 for a broader analysis).

Table 9
Content and Analysis of Small Group Learning Experiences

Description and content	**Nature**	**Vocabulary**	**First-hand**
Understanding prepositions card game and practical directions through finger puppet 'Bob'	Adult directed	Extensive	No
Making monsters from plastic bottles & paste and materials	Open-ended	Extensive	No
Occupations card game; playing hide & seek with the cards	Adult directed	Extensive	No
Exploring sea bream outdoors	Open-ended	Moderate	Yes
Children exploring sand & water in small individual containers	Open-ended	Limited	Yes
Children washing plastic animals in soapy water with cloths	Adult directed	Limited	No
Children using real hammers to hammer golf tees into play-dough	Open-ended	Limited	Yes
Children making play-dough in individual containers	Open-ended	Moderate	Yes
Making necklaces with thread and beads	Adult directed/ Product oriented	Limited	Yes
Adult directs play-dough making, & children play with it	Adult directed Open-ended	Moderate	Yes
Making people using paste, doilies, sticks and other materials	Adult directed Product oriented	Limited	No
Decorating ducks – pasting exercise & exploring shaving foam'	Product oriented Open-ended	Limited Moderate	No

Half of the experience offered first-hand opportunities and were open-ended. All of the experiences were well within the abilities of the children. The three educators were asked what inspired their SGLEs. Rachel reported, "*the children, what they have an interest in, what they want to do, and they're very loosely based around topics we're trying to get done in the year*". Katie revealed, *"the children...* [inspired her ideas] *mainly during free play*". For example, Katie had observed the children playing with play-dough during free-play and decided to offer making play-dough as a SGLE. Sarah also explained that the group experiences were inspired by the children "*just their conversation"*. In the analysis it appeared that only Katie's SGLEs were built on the interests of children in the play-dough making experience.

The meaningfulness of some of the materials used in the learning experiences could be questioned. The group learning experience Day 3 Birch 'Making people' was a pasting exercise. The materials included doilies, sticks, googly eyes and hair, as well as miscellaneous materials like feathers, stars, tiny bunnies, and eggs. However, the latter group of materials had little to do with 'making people'. A similar experience Day 4 Birch 'Making ducks' was undertaken the following week with pre-cut duck silhouettes and feathers but also the same miscellaneous materials - stars, tiny bunnies, and eggs. Another example of using inappropriate materials was in Cherry Day 2 'Making monsters'. As will be discussed in Chapter 6 this learning experience had been themed and preceded by stories and discussion. Whilst new vocabulary was introduced, the learning experience may not have been conducive to any extension of ideas about monsters. This may have been due to the materials presented. The ingredients included cotton wool balls, coconut, couscous and lentils. The children were given large (2 litre) plastic bottles, paste and many other small materials.

In the three learning experiences the children painted the paste onto the materials. In Birch the doilies became stuck to children's hands and that became a focus. In Cherry the children poured the materials into the bottles. Neither of the educators modelled what could have been achieved creatively. In Cherry there was a lot of discussion on what couscous and coconut were. There appeared to be freedom for children to express ideas, explore, predict, and problem-solve, but no encouragement to do so. They were simply pasting exercises. Successful SGLEs are those which make sense to children and are supported by appropriate materials (Adams et al., 2004). There is little point in offering learning experiences to children if all aspects of how it can cognitively engage them are not thought through and prepared in advance. As identified earlier in the reflective dialogues, perhaps the educators' focus on making a product detracted from

the learning potential of the experiences. In the reflective dialogue, Rachel stated that she would approach her SGLEs differently now having completed training in play therapy:

> *I don't do an awful lot of table top ...anymore. I do a lot of primary movement and physical activity, embodiment and projection.... It also depends on the group what their interests are; that particular group seemed to want a lot of table top* [experiences]. (Rachel, reflective dialogue)

The lack of the educators' success in extending children's thinking and language may also have been related to the manner in which the learning experiences were delivered.

The Process of Delivering the Learning Experiences

While delivering a SGLE, MacNaughton and Williams (2004) recommended specifying the task at hand, and breaking it down into small steps. Likewise, having a clear beginning, middle and end is recommended (Epstein et al., 2009). Learning experiences with a clear structure were observed. Rachel in particular was highly organised regarding the preparation and delivery of her SGLEs. She had most materials, (with the exception of the example above) and aprons ready to hand, and when needed had the table prepared with black plastic covering. She conducted both directed, focussed experiences and open-ended, imaginative experiences. The two directed learning experiences were structured, with a clear beginning, middle and end. Taking Day 3 Cherry, 'Occupations hide and seek' as an example, Rachel's main focus was for the children to identify people's occupations depicted on cards and play a game of hide and seek with matching cards. The materials included the set of cards of people in working clothes and blue tack to stick the card onto the wall. The components could be

described as: 1) identifying occupations; 2) children choosing an occupation card, and 3) hide and seek. One child at a time hid an occupation card within the room on the wall with blue tack. In the meantime, Rachel shielded a second child's eyes (the child who had the matching occupation card) and sang songs while waiting. The children remained engaged and cooperated throughout the learning experience. Rachel ensured that each child had a turn/received attention. She appeared to control the learning experience. There was no opportunity for children to explore materials as they were limited to playing cards; there was little conversation. In the reflective dialogue Rachel referred to the lack of cognitive challenge in the activities. In relation to this activity, Rachel reported, "*I could have extended it a lot more...there wasn't a huge amount of skill involved...it is not really challenging in any way*". Tellingly, she went on to say "*I don't ever remember in college being taught... here's how you create an activity, here's how you stay with it with the kids...and chat to them*".

Katie (Rowan) and Sarah (Birch) provided the materials; however there was limited evidence of introduction to the learning experiences, no clear beginning and every group ended with children leaving the table, one by one. In the reflective dialogue Sarah stated that since her training in HighScope she now "*understands the theory behind the practice*". She reported that at the time of initial data gathering she didn't "*understand that there was a beginning, middle and an end to small group time and the importance of interacting meaningfully with children*". It appeared as though the learning experiences were provided to amuse and occupy the children, without much thought to the content, or the process of delivering the learning experiences. As a result the learning was compromised. This significant finding will be discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the content and delivery of the learning experiences.

Summary – the Content and Delivery of the SGLEs

Of the three educators Rachel was the most organised, undertook the most planning for, and evaluation of, her learning experiences. She engaged in the most episodes of extended conversations and employed the greatest amount of interactions. In general, her learning experiences were the most themed and varied. However, the observations of the SGLEs and the educators own reflections indicated that the children could have been challenged to contribute more and extend their ideas in conversation. Some SGLEs offered children first-hand experiences and introduction to new words, if the learning experiences themselves and the materials appeared to be occasionally meaningless. Consistent with Adams et al. (2004), the low frequency of EPCs could be attributed to the educators' focus on closed-ended questioning interactions which did not encourage further conversation. It could also be due to the limited nature of the learning experiences and the degree of adult control.

To conclude, it is important to reiterate that the educators engaged the children's interest for the majority of the learning experiences. However, the educators did not appear to look for opportunities to cognitively enhance the children's thinking, nor did they appear to seize those opportunities when they arose. This raises questions about the emphasis placed in educators' training on the importance of interactions to facilitate learning. This is illustrated in the following example from Day 4 Rowan Making play-dough:

Katie:	*What are you making Chris*?
Chris:	*A big circle.*
Katie:	*A what*?
Chris:	*A big circle.*
Katie:	*A big circle*?
Chris:	*Yeah.* [Chris holds the bowl upside down. Katie is cleaning the table.]
Chris:	*Katie, it's like brown.* [The yellow play-dough looks brown through the transparent green bowl he is using.]
Katie:	*Is it!*
Chris:	*When I turn it upside down.*
Katie:	*Is it? When you turn it upside down*?
Chris:	[Chris turns the bowl right side up again.] *Now it's yellow again*
Katie:	Now *Chris, I want to go for a cup of tea, ok?* [Mary returns to the table; Katie leaves.]

Summary and Conclusion

What emerged from the data is that Rachel's focus on engaging children combined with her focus on distributing her attention equally amongst the children, appeared to impede her ability to relinquish conversational control to children and let them formulate their thoughts and responses. In maintaining control of the conversations she did not allow the children to be true conversational partners and for them to contribute sufficiently to the conversation. It could be argued that eight children is too large a group to have meaningful extended conversations (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Or perhaps the issue relates to educators' own professional preparation and priorities. It could also relate to issues of power and control (Devine, 2000). These complex issues in relation to professional preparation and power and control will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The nature of Katie's engagement with the children in conversations was relatively passive. Whereas Katie acknowledged the importance of interactions, by her own assessment and as observed, she stood back from engaging children in extended

conversation. It appeared that her interactions which could have enhanced children's thinking were limited to mainly directions in tidying up and caring for the environment or closed-ended questions which offered little cognitive challenge. Her ability to sustain interactions was impeded by regularly leaving the table to get materials for small group time, or interruptions through other adults or events happening. As discussed this is clearly linked to organisational and room management; perhaps it is also related to professional preparation. Educators need understanding and skill to engage children in extended purposive conversations (Tayler, 2001). This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Conflict resolution appeared to be a significant issue for Sarah. She focussed on children being friends. However, children must be challenged to think and talk in a constructive environment (Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Rogoff, 1998; Wells 1985a). Sarah used few open-ended questions. Her directions focussed on safety, and explanations for her actions. She anticipated conflicts and focussed on the learning experience, giving clear directions to children on what to do. However, between Sarah and the children there appeared to be minimal development of intersubjectivity, the key component of co-construction (Jordan, 2009) and of EPCs.

Scaffolding and extending, modelling and demonstrating interactions, identified through the literature review in Chapter 3 as critical to enhancing cognitive development, were rarely observed in the SGLEs. In the line-by-line analysis they represented only a tiny proportion of the interactions (3% of Rachel's; 2 % of Sarah's and 1% of Katie's). Whilst acknowledging the limitations on the time spent in the settings, the consistent lack of evidence across the three groups is worthy of attention and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The study findings suggest that complex and interrelated factors are implicated regarding what constitutes the nature of interactions. To conclude, drawing from all the data, the nature of observed interactions occurring in scheduled SGLEs between early childhood educators and three and four year old children, attending three selected ECEC settings in two urban areas designated as disadvantaged have been found to be as follows:

1. There was evidence of a lack of systematic organisational, team and individual planning and evaluation for scheduled SGLEs, to varying degrees across the settings. Common to all settings was evidence of a lack of planning and evaluation in relation to interaction strategies that could have been employed. This has negative implications for the quality of children's experiences in the settings.

2. The three educators had built positive relationships with all of the children in their care. Such relationships are central to establish sufficient security and trust for children to share opinions and viewpoints (Rinaldi, 2006). These relationships were characterised by interactions where educators demonstrated warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness, concern, affirmation, and respectful gentle guidance of children's behaviour. This positive finding verifies the educators' priorities in emphasising children social and emotional development. It is an important first step towards EPCs. However, the educators did not appear to prioritise developing children's thinking and language. Only Rachel focussed on their language development, in the context of children with speech and language difficulties. Undoubtedly speech and language delays are an issue in relation to children's ability to engage in conversations.

3. The educators succeeded in jointly engaging with the children in the SGLEs. However, the line-by-line analysis of six of the learning experiences revealed that a little more than a third of the total interactions between educators and children were in episodes of conversations. The balance of the interactions appears to favour affirming/encouraging, questioning, directing interactions and redirecting interactions. Although the educators demonstrated that they have some capacity to sustain their interactions with the children, the extension of the conversations was possibly compromised by the over use of closed-ended questions. Episodes of EPCs between educators and children were not in evidence in the SGLEs.

4. The learning experiences themselves appeared to be appropriate to the current capabilities of the children. The open-ended activities appeared to have more potential for EPCs. The experiences engaged, but did not challenge, the children. The SGLEs, in some instances, appeared to be characterised by poor planning, presentation and demonstration and purposelessness of materials presented. The educators did not draw from children's own interests, supporting their expertise to flourish. The experiences appeared to be limited and limiting.

The findings imply that early childhood educators must be supported to focus on pedagogy to enhance children's thinking and language as well as building positive relationships. This is of particular importance in settings in areas designated as disadvantaged as the benefits of attending high quality ECEC can make a significant difference to children's life chances. In the following chapter, the discussion and analysis on these key findings are continued.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings which emerged from this small-scale study in relation to the literature on educational inequality and interactions in the context of pedagogy outlined in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. This chapter presents the discussion in four parts. The first part focuses on planning for and evaluation of interactions in SGLEs. The second part considers the educators' interactions, from the perspective of extending children's thinking and language through extended purposive conversations. Significant elements of the educator-child interactions are featured. The third part examines the content and delivery of the SGLEs. The fourth part considers the professional preparation of the educators. Figure 17, over leaf, illustrates the findings in this research study in relation to the key concepts presented in Figure 8 The Influences on the Nature of the Interactions in SGLEs in the Context of Educational Inequality (see Chapter 3 Summary and Conclusion).

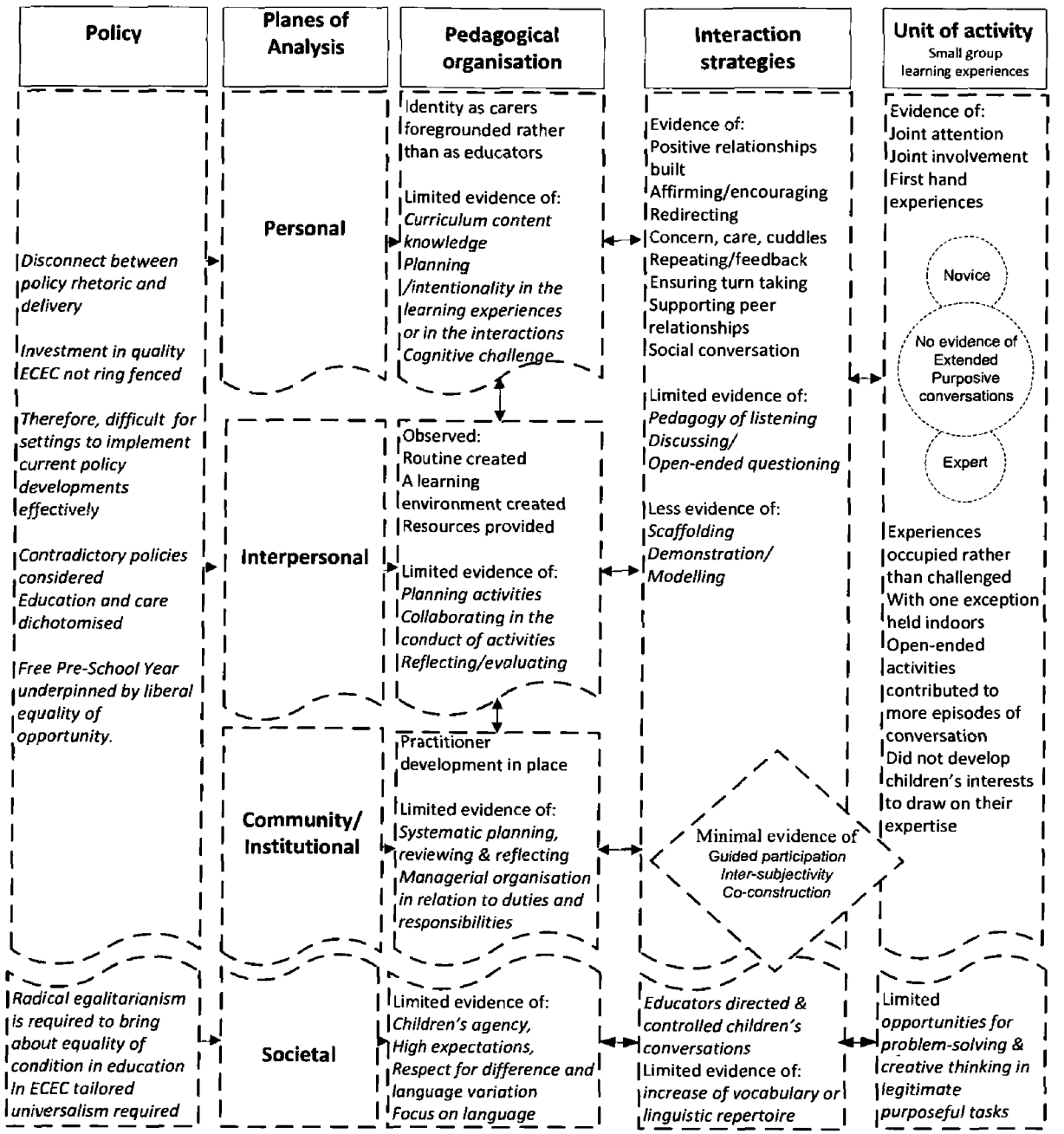

Figure 17 Research findings in relation to the influences on the nature of interactions in SGLEs in the context of educational inequality

Planning for and Evaluation of Interactions in SGLEs

Both *Síolta* and *Aistear* emphasise planning and evaluation as essential building blocks while striving for professional practice. Professional practice enhanced through institutional (setting), interpersonal (team) and personal planning and evaluation

(Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann & Weikart 1995; Moyles, et al., 2002a; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) is central to achieving high quality ECEC (CECDE, 2007) and supporting children's early learning (NCCA, 2009b, 2009d). What emerged from the research data appeared to be an absence of systematic planning for, and subsequent critical evaluation of, interactions in the SGLEs.

Institutional Planning and Evaluation

Educators need organisational support to remain focused on the children (and their interactions) in SGLEs. Even expert pedagogues need "helpful structures" and a working context of informed support within the organisation of the setting (Bowman et al., 2001, p. 319). A commitment to the professional development of staff and quality ECEC necessitates the operation of supervision and appraisal systems by management (CECDE, 2007). This requires the creation of non-threatening routine occasions when educators individually evaluate their performance at work and establish goals for the ECEC setting, for professional preparation and personal progress (CECDE, 2007). However, the acceptability of disruptions and interruptions to the SGLEs (as catalogued in Chapter 5) suggests an absence of supervision or evaluation of the SGLEs. An awareness of the importance of these experiences as rich sites for learning is not apparent, particularly in Rowan.

Funding constraints may result in the engagement of part-time workers such as Katie. By virtue of her restricted hours, she was precluded from attending planning meetings and further training. Failure to plan for children's learning may demonstrate a conception of SGLEs as opportunities to amuse and occupy children rather than enhance children's development (Adams et al., 2004). Such a conception is inconsistent

with the role of early childhood education. Planning must be a priority when seeking to deploy limited resources to maximise staff contact hours with the children. The responsibility for evaluating young children's learning ultimately rests with the management of the settings. It is up to all educators to ensure that the setting continues to maximise the learning opportunities for children.

Team Planning and Evaluation

The literature is consistent in relation to the manner in which effective teamwork enables all educators to provide each child with appropriate and consistent support. Such teamwork results in collaborative practice in implementing the curriculum (Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann & Weikart, 1995; Moyles et al., 2002a). The team planning reported by the educators in Rowan and Birch, in this study, appeared to run counter to professional practice as signified by researchers such as Moyles, et al. (2002a) and Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002). In addition, a lack of coordination and boundary-keeping between the key workers and the groups of children in Rowan, and to a lesser extent in Birch, was observed (see Chapter 5 Pedagogical Organisation). This suggests a lack of team planning. Planning for boundary keeping in Cherry was unnecessary as Rachel held her SGLEs in isolation.

This absence of planning, and subsequent evaluation, was evident in examples outlined in Chapter 5 and resulted in some episodes of interruptions and disruption between the groups in Rowan and Birch. The converse may have been achieved if mutually compatible learning experiences were specifically planned by the whole team, for small groups sharing the same space. At a minimum, such learning experiences could perhaps be conducted in a manner that would avoid one group interfering with or

interrupting the other. The absence of team planning clearly frustrated any opportunity to enable teams to work collaboratively in the interests of children's learning and development in SGLEs.

Personal Planning and Evaluation

In the study, there appeared to be an absence of individual planning and evaluation which is critical for enhancing children's thinking, language and providing cognitive challenge (Moyles et al., 2002a). Key features of effective learning experiences to promote children's thinking include planning SGLEs in advance, consideration of the purpose of the experience incorporating learning objectives, and identifying the resources required (Hohmann et al., 2008; NCCA, 2009d). However, there are challenges inherent in planning. Adams et al. (2004) highlights the UK situation where a prescribed curriculum is in place. Detailed planning based on specific outcomes could be seen as limiting young children and underestimates the richness and diversity of their learning. Adams et al. suggest that planning based on specific outcomes impoverishes children's learning. They recommend "open-ended provision, where the learning outcomes are unpredictable" (Adams et al., p. 25). However, it should also be noted that in the study, Adams et al. encountered written and detailed plans in each setting. This contrasts to the data in this research, where it would appear that there was limited planning in place in relation to SGLEs, and with the exception of Cherry, no written plans (Transcriptions of Interviews). This is one reason why the experiences and the interactions may appear to be limited in this study.

Aistear (NCCA, 2009a) combines the benefits of planning with the flexibility of open-ended provision. *Aistear* clearly recommends identification of the vocabulary to

be used in discussion with the children and planning for the interaction strategies to be employed (NCCA, 2009d). This is particularly important in ECEC settings in areas of educational inequality. As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 increasing some children's linguistic repertoire is required to support those children to successfully engage in schools (Edwards, 1989). The educators in Rowan and Birch did not identify and plan for the vocabulary to be used. Some consideration was given in Cherry to using specific words to support children's development (Transcriptions of Interviews). None of the three educators specifically planned for interactions. Their planning for SGLEs varied.

The professional qualities of ECEC educators are described as the skills and attributes which are brought to, and developed through, practice within the role of early childhood educator (Moyles et al., 2002a). Katie was educated to Level 5 FETAC. This, in combination with the part-time nature of her work, may have restricted her skills to engage the children in EPCs. She appeared to be the least prepared, of the three educators, for the SGLEs. Rachel and Sarah were educated to Level 8 HETAC. It appeared that both Katie and Sarah had little time to prepare and plan for the SGLEs. This lack of planning and preparation in ECEC is consistent with other studies (Hargreaves, 2003; Moss & Petrie, 2002 cited in Fumoto & Robson, 2006). The absence of planning has long-term implications, particularly in terms of affording time for professional thinking. Professional thinking involves reflecting on practice and making informed decisions through analysis and study of one's own pedagogy (Moyles et al., 2002a). The literature implies that there is a need for an institutional ethos that values and supports team and individual planning for SGLEs as essential in the development of children's thinking (Moyles et al., 2002a). Drawing from the NCCA, 2009d and Hohmann et al., 2008, Figure 18 depicts a planning and evaluation cycle for SGLEs.

See also Appendix 20 Small Group Learning Experience Daily Planning Sheet (drawn from Hohmann et al., 2008 & NCCA, 2009d).

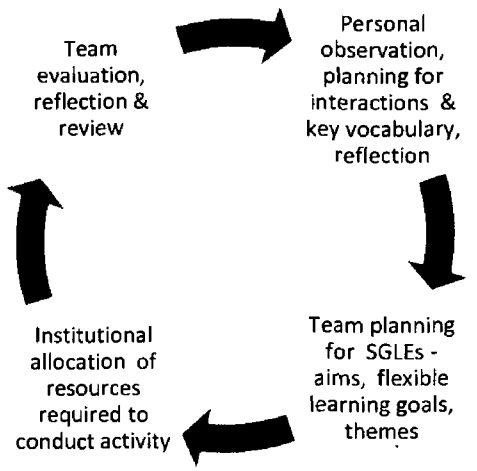

Figure 18 Planning for and evaluating interactions in SGLEs

The absence of any evident planning for and evaluation of interactions in SGLEs implies that the potential for positive outcomes for children's learning is curtailed. In particular, dispositions for learning such as problem-solving, and language development, so critical to support children's successful engagement in schools may not be realised (Bourdieu, 1986; Cregan, 2008). Support of the implementation of curricula incorporating interactions is required for educators to optimise children's early learning.

Issues that Emerged in Relation to Interactions

As discussed in Chapter 3, children learn as social beings through interactions, in the context of reciprocal interpersonal relationships. Cognition thus occurs within a collaborative process (Rogoff, 1998). Consistent with the literature, a key finding in this research was that all three educators succeeded in building positive interpersonal relationships with the children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; David et al., 2002; Hohmann & Weikart, 1995; NCCA, 2009b). Such relationships enable children to feel sufficiently

confident to become engaged in challenging experiences (NCCA, 2009b; Rinaldi, 2006) and therefore in EPCs.

Establishing Positive Interpersonal Relationships

Affection and warmth between the three educators and the children in their care was clearly evident during the field work for this research. The findings in this study are consistent with other research (Adams et al., 2004). The quality of the relationships was characterised by smiles and children's ease and comfort around the educators. The educators shared many positive characteristics which are identified in the literature relating to educator-child relationships. It was clear that the adults met the children's physical needs, the children trusted the adults, and the adults were empathetic and responsive and willingly gave help when needed (Bowman et al., 2001; David et al., 2002; Epstein, 2007a). Furthermore, the educators were focussed on the children at their physical level, made eye contact and promptly attended to children who were distressed (Hohmann et al., 2008). They accepted and valued children through photos of the children in action and in one setting photos of their families (as advised by NCCA, 2009a). During free–play the educators supported the children's dramatic play, by being playful and participating in the play (Epstein, 2007b). The adults also remained calm during social conflicts and guided children's behaviour (Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann et al., 2008, NCCA, 2009a). In common with settings in the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Melhuish & Sammons, 2008) and consistent with advice given by the NCCA (2009a), all three educators talked through and rationalised conflicts, in addition to offering explanations. As recommended in Chapter 3, children experienced comforting and secure attachments (David et al., 2002). The three

educators acknowledged, affirmed and encouraged the children and their accomplishments (Epstein, 2007a; NCCA, 2009a; Smith, 1999).

However, it is not sufficient for educators to focus their interaction strategies on building relationships. Children's thinking and language will only develop if the children are challenged to think and talk and if the environment and ethos is one in which they are comfortable to do so (Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Rogoff, 1998; Wells 1985a). Consistent with a study undertaken by Alexander (2000) this research revealed that any discussions were hampered by the vagueness of the conversation (see Chapter 5 for examples). In the reflective dialogue Sarah identified the conversation as being "*flighty*". She attributed this to a lack of training at that time. In Cherry, where greater amounts of episodes of conversations were evidenced, discussion appeared to be hampered by Rachel's insistence on everyone getting a turn to practice speaking. Indeed this was confirmed in the reflective dialogues where Rachel discussed the dilemma she has between correcting speech or encouraging extended dialogue. She acknowledged that an ideal circumstance would be to plan for interesting experiences that will encourage conversation (see Chapter 5 What Supports and What Hinders Interactions and later in this chapter for further discussion). In general, there appeared to be minimal development in children's language and thinking. This is further discussed below.

Establishing Intersubjectivity and Co-Construction

Children's home lives are a rich pedagogical resource (Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Wells, 1985a). In Birch, Sarah practised establishing a common knowledge by referencing children's home lives as a strategy to extend children's language and thinking (as advocated by Tizard & Hughes, 2002). The literature has highlighted the

importance of this as children at risk of educational underachievement often demonstrate lesser spoken language skills (Hart & Risley, 1995; Locke et al., 2002). Sarah listened attentively to the children. However, this research has highlighted that, while the educator listened, the conversations tended to be at a superficial level. Sarah kept the conversation going, using what Wells (1985a) calls 'sustaining strategies', and she did not impose her ideas. However, contrary to the recommendations from the literature referred to in Chapter 3, Sarah was not being a catalyst to provoke, co-construct, and stimulate children's thinking (Dewey, 1966; Jordan, 2009). Cognitive construction requires each participant in the conversation to engage with the understandings of the other. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004, p.720) identified that "learning is achieved through a process of reflexive co-construction". The conditions for co-construction require that the participants are engaged and that the content should be instructive in order for the learning to be worthwhile (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Jordan (2009) advises that the content should be meaningful and of interest to children. These dynamics were rarely evidenced in SGLEs observed in this study.

The focus of this study is the nature of the interactions. As discussed above, the educators engaged with the children in relationship building interactions, affirming/encouraging them, enabling collaborative behaviour amongst the children and physical caring for them. However, the educator's ability to facilitate children's thinking and language development was also relevant to this research. 'Co-constructed decision making', between educators and children, has been established as one of the most child-empowering interaction strategies (Jordan, 2009). Jordan identified that if educators were unaware of the educational value of engaging with children's

understandings, or were lacking the interactive skills to do that, then children were unlikely to be empowered. This deficiency of awareness appeared to be evidenced in the field work in this study. The conversations between Sarah and the children illustrated this (see pp. 155-156) as they did not appear to involve active co-construction of a skill or an idea. Neither did it appear that the children were empowered.

While experiences such as making play-dough offer opportunities for creativity, discovery and exploration, this research highlighted missed opportunities for learning and for the development of dispositions and competencies so valued in schools (Kellaghan, 2001). With planning and forethought, co-construction of knowledge could be achieved. For example, children's thinking and language could be have been extended through talking about how to make play-dough; consideration of the uses of play-dough or experimentation with making the play-dough. To be effective a pedagogy of listening must be in place (Rinaldi, 2006). This involves listening with intentionality and creating authentic opportunities for children's thinking to become apparent and validated. Vocabulary and language development could be developed (Tough, 1977). As Wells (1985a) suggested the most effective way of supporting children to talk, and thus learn, is for educators and children to engage together collaboratively to negotiate and co-construct meaning.

Underpinning the idea of co-construction, as discussed in Chapter 3, is intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is an intricate mechanism for interpersonal or cooperative learning and understanding (Trevarthen, 1980). As evidenced in Chapter 5 the educators were engaged with the children and sensitive to their needs. However, in the observed interactions there was little demonstration of intersubjectivity in their interactions with children in the learning experiences. The conversations were followed

but meaning was not negotiated. There appeared to be limited psychological adjustments made to the understanding of what children said or co-ordination of goals (as suggested in the literature, for example Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Trevarthen). This was confirmed by Rachel and Sarah in the reflective dialogues. Having reviewed the videos of the SGLEs, they both expressed disappointment in the apparent lack of meaningful engagement in conversations with the children.

Relinquishing Control in Conversations with Children

In order to support participation and learning, educators are advised to nurture and acknowledge children's ability to do things for themselves through empowering them and sharing control (NCCA, 2009a). If educators maintain control, children have little opportunities to make choices or decisions and learn from consequences. Sharing control, on the other hand, results in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and parity of esteem (Baker et al., 2004; Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann et al., 2008). As observed in the field work for this study the educators appeared to maintain conversational control in both subject matter and pace. The children were not observed responding, perhaps because they had insufficient time to formulate their thoughts in order to engage in conversation. Wood, McMahon and Cranstoun (1980) suggested that by giving children time to think and removing pressure to make their thoughts known, children will articulate their ideas (Wood et al., as cited in Hohmann et al., 2008 and Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a).

Giving children conversational control requires, in the first instance, believing in children's agency and power and acknowledging the powerful position that adults hold (Devine, 2000; Rinaldi, 2006). Sharing conversational control with children involves

listening to their questions (Rinaldi), taking cues from them and following their conversational lead (Epstein, 2007b). Furthermore, conversational control requires clarifying children's ideas, turn taking, adding brief observations or comments (if appropriate) to sustain conversation and establishing intersubjectivity (Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann et al., 2008; Tizard & Hughes, 2002). Finally, it is important to focus on *what* children say rather than *how* they say it (Epstein, 2007b; Hohmann et al., 2008). This last point raises an issue for this study. Whereas the most skilled educator (Rachel) engaged the children, as demonstrated in the analysis, she rarely shared conversational control. Consistent with educators in a study conducted by Alexander (2000) she sacrificed the development and extension of the conversation in favour of an emphasis on each child's participation.

However, there is another perspective which influenced her interactions. All three educators identified that at least half of the total population of children attending the settings had been diagnosed as having speech and language difficulties. This was one factor in their referral to the settings. It should be noted, however, that in relation to the 6 selected SGLEs that were subject to line-by-line analysis only one sixth of the children had speech difficulties. Rachel had completed a speech and language communication programme (the Hanen Programme developed by Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002). As recorded in the research diary:

> Three mothers came to chat. One in particular talked about a visit ... to the Speech and Language Therapist with her son, Jack. He's doing extremely well. His listening skills are excellent; he's missing a few 'f's in words but gets them sometimes. Because of the work achieved in the setting the Speech & Language Therapist feels he doesn't need any further support from her, bar a six month check up. (Research diary, Cherry, 28.04.2009)

When viewed from the context of conversing with children with speech and language difficulties and the training which Rachel received, it is understandable that she gave such emphasis to *how* children pronounced words, and that each child got a chance to speak. As evidenced above, clearly her work was valued by speech and language professionals (and parents). Rachel's dilemma in risking discouragement of children's conversation, as identified in Chapter 5 Pedagogical Organisation, is critical. Her instincts display sensitivity to Edwards' (1989) suggestion that to correct children's language can create linguistic insecurity. The literature is persuasive on the importance of language in "bridging the discontinuity between the competencies and dispositions children bring to school and those valued in schools" (Kellaghan, 2001, p. 18). The issue of speech and language delay in young children cannot be ignored when such a delay can gravely impact on a child's ability to achieve their full potential. However, it could be questioned as to whether Rachel's interactions display a balanced theoretical understanding of the role of speech in extending children's thinking. The observations and the interviews and the reflective dialogues suggest that this understanding appears to be lacking. Rachel's analysis of what would be the most appropriate response to apparent delay in speech and language development is consistent with a deficit perspective.

In the reflective dialogues all three educators stated that speech and language difficulties were not an impediment to communication. Research in the US has shown that children from low-income families are one and a half years behind their wealthier peers in language ability when they start school (Shanahan, 2010). Research in Ireland has highlighted the link between variation in language use and success in primary school, particularly in the development of literacy skills of children attending schools in areas designated as disadvantaged (Cregan, 2008). It was recommended that children

need "to have more opportunity to talk in school as part of legitimate purposeful learning tasks" (Cregan, p. 188). Cregan acknowledged that teachers need support to develop the appropriate skills to encourage children to talk. This is even more important for ECEC educators as they are working with the children at an earlier, more receptive stage of development. Educators need to understand the educational status of talk (Alexander, 2008), and have an awareness of what their interactions can and cannot achieve. Children are at their "linguistically most active" when offered time to think and respond (Wood et al., 1980, p.81).

One common theme observed in the study was the attention that both Rachel and Sarah gave to manners, using 'enforced repetition' repeatedly asking children to say "*please*" and "*thank you*". The emphasis on manners curtailed the conversation. The focus on manners resonates with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social reproduction. It could be argued that if children were consistently subjected to correction of their manners, in settings in areas of disadvantage, they would experience an education system that is systematically biased towards the culture of middle class expression. This is evidenced by disproportionate time and value placed on imposing social conventions and codes and warrants comment, and further study. Rachel and Sarah invested significant time and attention to social mores, correcting and admonishing children to respond in a 'mannerly' way. If all adults in a staff team consistently model appropriate respectful and courteous interactions with children, children will respond similarly, without being forced. The time spent with these interactions inevitably distracts from more engaging and challenging discourse. Asking children to say 'please and thank you' is another example of the adults controlling the conversation. The most effective conversationalists ask the least questions (Wood et al., 1980). That is the focus of the next section.

The Need for Open-ended Questioning

Open-ended questions are regarded as the most significant forms of questions which result in EPCs (Alexander, 2000; Durden & Dangel, 2008; Fisher, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). Siraj-Blatchford and Manni concluded that, in their study of the questions asked by the educators in the REPEY research, the result of 5.5% of questioning being open-ended was disappointingly low. The results demonstrated a clear need for further emphasis and training in the use of open-ended questioning to enhance children's thinking through EPCs. In this study, the line-by-line analysis of the three educators' interactions in their first two learning experiences revealed that, of all questions asked, the proportion of the open-ended questioning interactions were 5% for Rachel, 3% for Katie and 4% for Sarah.

In this study such a paucity of open-ended questioning, albeit over a limited amount of time, in the line-by-line analysis of six SGLEs is unsatisfactory. Whereas all three educators agree on the importance of interactions, the evidence suggests that the educators may not be aware of the distinctions between the different responses their questions might elicit, or indeed how to engage children in conversations to enhance their thinking and language. As reported in this study, the three educators' conversations were dominated by a range of closed-ended questions. Of those closed-ended questions the majority required yes/no responses. Adams et al. (2004, p. 64) attributed the low frequency of "sustained purposeful talk" to the use of adult questioning which resulted in one word responses. This served to limit the development of conversation. The educators did not appear to focus on developing children's conversational contributions. The literature on educational inequality emphasises the importance of respect and parity of esteem between people (Baker et al., 2004). Seriously listening and responding to

children's contributions demonstrates respect. It equally supports children in having a voice (Devine, 2000), which is critically important in these settings (Cregan, 2008).

Challenging Children's Thinking in SGLEs

As defined in Chapter 3 'cognitively challenging questions' are designed to develop children's thinking and responses beyond the immediate to reflect and talk about what they have done, are doing, and plan to do (Massey, 2004). Inherent in this definition is that in scheduled SGLEs educators have the potential to consciously and purposefully design their questions (and comments and acknowledgments) to create cognitive demand (Durden & Dangel, 2008; Massey). In doing so children would be encouraged to think deeply and to develop higher-order processing skills. In this study, the cognitive demand was observed to be generally low. In the bounded SGLEs children were rarely asked to describe, recall or elaborate. Equally, they were rarely required to problem-solve and never to engage in conversations characterised by high cognitive challenge. There were some variations in this finding which related to the nature of the learning experience (this will be discussed later).

The findings in relation to cognitive challenge are echoed in other studies from around the world; many adults in early childhood settings focus on conversations with low levels of complexity (Adams et al., 2004 [UK]; Durden & Dangel, 2008 [US]; Massey, 2004 [US]; Tayler, 2001 [Australia]). Massey proposes that children need to be able to engage in such conversations (labelling and locating objects) successfully before they are able to engage in expressing higher-order thinking skills such as explaining, comparing, and predicting. As a general guide, Massey recommends that 70% of the conversation should be targeted by educators on a concrete level of conversation to

encourage a cognitive foundation. However, in order to encourage learning, Massey recommends that 30% of conversation should engage higher level skill. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 the setting of an objective such as this could support some children in settings in areas of educational inequality to engage more effectively with the school system (Cregan, 2008; Kellaghan, 2001).

The Absence of Scaffolding and Modelling/demonstration

In the line-by-line analysis of six SGLEs, there was an apparent absence of modelling and demonstration, scaffolding and extending interactions. These interactions in total represented only a tiny proportion of all the interactions (Rachel 3%; Sarah 2 % and Katie 1%). Analysis combining both the EPPE and REPEY studies found that in the settings of the highest quality (as measured by the ECERS-E), educators engaged in more modelling and demonstration (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Thus, the absence of modelling and demonstrating in this study is particularly discouraging.

Socio-cultural theory maintains that children's higher-order thinking or intellectual processes are developed through the scaffolding of children's developing understanding achieved through social interaction with skilled partners in their cultural context (Smith, 1999). As discussed in Chapter 3, Vygotsky's theory places emphasis on adults as facilitators of children learning. A key challenge for educators is to have sufficient knowledge of children's current level of development, which then becomes the challenge of defining the limits of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and matching or tuning the adult support to a point beyond the child's current capabilities. Based on the 12 observed SGLEs the educators did not appear to assist the children to reach higher levels of competence which the children could not have achieved on their

own. In Sarah's case, beyond physically holding materials for children, there appeared to be little or no evidence of children's learning being scaffolded in the four SGLEs. There appeared to be no evidence in the case of Katie that she scaffolded children's learning in the SGLEs. Skill is required to "outpace development rather than follow it" as suggested by Alexander (2008, p. 102).

In Chapter 3 a range of tasks and strategies involved in scaffolding were identified (Berk & Winsler, 1995). In this study of SGLEs there appeared to be little if any evidence of such strategies. The apparent absence of understanding and skill, demonstrated in the settings and confirmed in the reflective dialogues, has clear implications for professional preparation (see later for discussion). None of the educators thought they had experienced sufficient training in interaction strategies and the conduct of SGLEs.

This research is grounded in the literature of effective pedagogy in ECEC. As outlined in Chapter 3, pedagogy is not just about teaching and learning but is imbued with the values, attitudes and beliefs of the educators. The research evidence presented in Chapter 5 illustrated the positive relationships that had been built and the evident focus on developing children's social skills. It appeared that in the study the children were engaged in the learning experiences. These are important first steps towards challenging children's thinking (Bowman et al., 2001) in EPCs.

Research has proven that to best enhance the learning outcomes for children at risk of educational underachievement, equal attention must be paid to children's cognitive development as is paid to social development (Bowman et al., 2001; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). For the children in this study, the development of language skills is also important (Edwards, 1989; Riley et al., 2004; Tough, 1977). There was

minimal evidence of developing children's thinking and language in the SGLEs. These findings indicate, and were confirmed in the reflective dialogues, that through their interactions, the educators prioritised children's social development over their cognitive or language development in the observed SGLEs. As represented in Figure 19 the balance should be tipped in favour of developing children's thinking and language in EPCs in SGLEs.

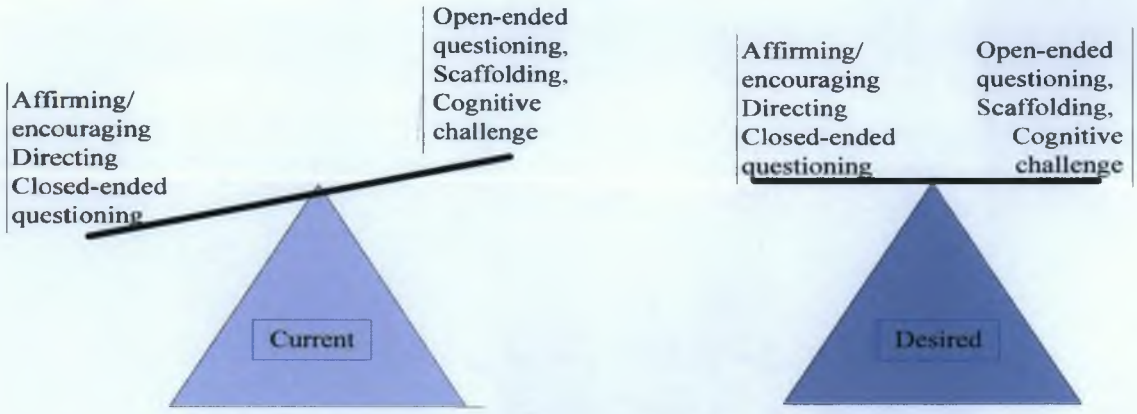

Figure 19 Tipping the balance towards children's thinking and language in SGLEs

The Content and Delivery of the SGLEs

The achievement of settings in the REPEY study, as evidenced by the cognitive outcomes of the children attending, appeared to be "directly related to the quantity and quality of the teacher/adult planned and initiated focused group work that is provided" (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004, p. 720). From a socio-cultural perspective learning occurs through guided participation in small and large groups (Rogoff, 1998). What children learn is therefore dependent on the opportunities provided. Although scheduled SGLEs have significant potential to enhance children's learning and development, in this study that potential did not appear to be fully realised.

The Nature of the Learning Experiences and the Materials

There is research evidence which suggests that children, who are involved in learning experiences that are meaningful and interesting to them, engage in higher-order thinking (Jordan, 2009). Experiences should be relevant and offer first-hand opportunities through direct experimentation and discovery about the real world (Adams et al., 2004). First-hand learning experiences fuel children's imagination and unquenchable thirst for understanding (see Chapter 3, p. 73 for a definition). Positive dispositions towards learning are particularly important for children at risk of educational inequality (Kellaghan, 2001). First-hand learning experiences occur in everyday contexts when children engage in experiences which matter to them (Rich & Drummond, 2006).

With one notable exception (Day 4, Cherry, 'exploring fish') the experiences observed in this study did not appear to be about exploring and finding out about how everyday things and processes worked. In Durden and Dangel's (2008) research the most successful activity that involved engagement of the children in conversation and extension of their thinking was making sandwiches for their lunches. Learning experiences such as these are attuned to children's nature and characteristics at this young age. Children need to experience the world for themselves, see, hear, touch, taste and feel, be involved in their learning, and it has to be real and meaningful to them (Rich et al., 2005).

Anning and Edwards (2006, p.161) commented in relation to their study, that some of the experiences could be considered to be "trite and undemanding". The same could be said from some of the SGLEs in this study. One example of an experience

which had potential for learning was the 'Making necklaces' experience. The research data revealed that the learning potential was not realised. Research evidence suggests that children are competent thinkers when their thinking occurs in an 'embedded context' which makes sense to them. The embedded context is developed physically (resources to encourage curiosity, creativity, wonder and reflection) and verbally through a child "having a sense of purpose in participating in the learning experience" critical for developing children's thinking (Fleer, 1995, p. 20).

In common with the findings outlined by Adams et al. (2004) the SGLEs in this study appeared to be characterised by low cognitive challenge and, in some instances, appeared meaningless or lacked relevance to the children's interests or personal concerns. Adams et al. (2004) referred to the limitations of the experiences in their study in terms of a poverty of experience. They identified that a double impoverishment was at work: a minimal role for children's creativity and a conceptual poverty where there was a focus on giving children things to do rather than engage with the 'big ideas' that the learning experience could engender. In this study a third deficit could be added, that of 'process'. There appeared to be little attention paid to how to support children's own construction of knowledge and discovery. The apparent lack of success in extending children's thinking was perhaps related, to some degree, to the manner in which the learning experiences were conducted.

The Process of Delivering the SGLEs

Features of effective SGLEs were evident in this study across the settings. These features included: the key worker system, resulting in a stable group of children; a range of different materials; a set of materials for each child, and a consistent location for each

of the three groups (Epstein et al., 2009; Hohman et al., 2008, NCCA, 2009a). This suggests key elements of effective pedagogical practice are in place in the settings.

Regarding the sources of ideas for small group time the literature suggests that these can emanate from children's interests based on educator's observations of children's play or events meaningful to children; seasonal learning experiences and community experiences; curriculum content; new, underused or favourite materials; local traditions and customs; and text books (Epstein, 2007b; Epstein et al., 2009; High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1999; Hohman et al., 2008). In this study, with the exception of Katie, few of the learning experiences stemmed from children's interests. Katie reported that the children like playing with play-dough so she thought they would like to make it.

Issues of planning, purpose and preparation regarding SGLEs have been addressed. The implementation of the learning experience in HighScope theory, although not apparent in the observations of the SGLEs, includes consideration of the beginning of the learning experience regarding how materials are distributed or how the scene is set. The middle of the learning experience requires thought on how each child's ideas, solutions, language are supported in the use of the materials, and how children's learning can be extended and scaffolded. Finally, the SGLE is brought to a close (Hohmann et al., 2008). The three educators varied in the delivery of the SGLEs.

Rachel was clearly the most organised and prepared of the three educators. In her learning experiences she consistently introduced a topic and then followed through in practice. As can be seen from Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes, she offered a range of both directed and open-ended learning experiences and the children demonstrated engagement with them. She was also unique in having a clear beginning,

middle and end in her SGLEs. She introduced the learning experience through a game or a story. During the middle of the learning experience (for example, Cherry Day 2, Making monsters) she observed children and went from child to child. However, during that SGLE, Rachel did not model how to undertake the task contrary to recommended practice (Epstein et al., 2009; Hohman et al., 2008; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). In common with Sarah, she did refer children to each other for help with reaching materials. The three educators were limited in their use of scaffolding. Children worked with the materials without comment from Rachel. She emphasised that it was the children's work not hers and that they could do "*whatever*" they liked with the materials. This passive stance runs contrary to effective pedagogy as outlined by the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2002). In common with Sarah, she brought the learning experience to an end by giving a three minute warning. She made the 'cleaning up' part of the learning experience and helped children transition to the next part of the routine (Epstein et al., 2009; Hohman et al., 2008). There was limited evidence of any plans or statements for follow-up learning experiences to be delivered arising from the observed SGLEs.

It is recommended that whereas learning experiences can be held anywhere, children should gather as a group in a consistent location, before moving on to the experience (Epstein et al., 2009). In the study, only one SGLE was delivered out of doors. The group gathered as recommended in their group room and then proceeded out. The learning experience was exploring fish. Little value is placed by educators in ECEC settings in Ireland on the outdoors as a learning environment (Duffy, 2007).

Professional Preparation

While considering why there was such little evidence of EPCs in this research, reasons already proposed include the apparent absence of planning and evaluation. As discussed, none of the educators planned for interactions in the learning experiences, although some planning was in place for the SGLEs. Further reasons included the predominance of closed-ended questions and educator conversational control. In the reflective dialogues both Rachel and Sarah reported, having looked at the videos, that they didn't demonstrate sufficient trust in the children's ability to make their own discoveries and explorations (see p. 133). This links with the importance of educators having high expectations of children's learning and communicating that to the children. Validation of young children's contributions appears to be particularly important for children at risk of educational inequality (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Both Rachel and Sarah identified that their attitudes towards the children's discoveries, explorations and contributions had changed in the intervening two years since the initial data gathering. They both reported that this was due to further training they had received.

From the findings it would appear that the amount of open-ended questions the educators used, potentially leading to cognitive challenge, and the proportion of the interactions characterised by episodes of extended conversations (see Figure 16 Analysis of Episode of Extended Conversations) were also directly related to the level of professional preparation and experience of the educators.

This research highlights the need for professional training and continuing professional development in order to engage children in EPCs. Consistent with studies in Australia, this research also suggests a reappraisal of early childhood educators'

beliefs about their role as educators and their current pedagogical practices if Irish ECEC settings are to achieve the outcomes that all children, particularly those living with poverty, merit (Tayler, 2001). From the observations, exit interviews and as confirmed in the reflective dialogues, the educators saw their role as carers with an obligation to compensate for perceived deficits in the children's families. They prioritised the development of social relationships and social cohesion in their practice. In the reflective dialogues, the three educators identified a lack of training to cognitively engage children in EPCs. There are numerous studies which identify the positive connection between the training of the educators and the subsequent improved outcomes for children (Lobman, 2006; Rudd, Cain & Saxon 2008; Saracho and Spodek, 2007; Sylva et al., 2005). Educator training has been identified as the aspect of quality ECEC which has the most profound effect on children's learning and development (Rudd et al.).

In this research the educators varied in their qualifications and experience. Rachel was the most qualified and experienced and demonstrated the greatest potential to engage in EPCs. Katie had the lowest level of qualifications and appeared to demonstrate the least ability to provide cognitive challenge and extension in her interactions. Sarah was also qualified to degree level, but had the least experience. Whereas she appeared to demonstrate some potential to sustain conversations, she did not engage in EPCs. In the SGLEs, none of the educators engaged in the kinds of interactions that the literature suggests are of most benefit to the cognitive development of three and four year old children. Based on their interactions in the SGLEs, the educators appeared to be lacking the required understanding and skills to use interaction strategies associated with facilitating children's thinking and language, and to engage

children in EPCs. This has implications for the attention paid to developing skills associated with EPCs in the educators' professional preparation.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter the findings on pedagogical organisation in the selected SGLEs were discussed within institutional/setting planning and evaluation, interpersonal/team planning and evaluation, and finally personal planning and evaluation. Issues that emerged in relation to interactions were discussed. Establishing positive relationships, intersubjectivity and co-construction, relinquishing control in conversations with children and the absence of open-ended questioning were discussed as was the apparent absence of scaffolding, modelling and demonstration. It was suggested that the emphasis appeared to be on interaction strategies such as affirming/encouraging, closed-ended questions and directing, and that the balance should be tipped in favour of interaction strategies which are associated with enhancing children's thinking and language such as scaffolding, and open-ended questioning. Both the content and the delivery of the SGLEs to enable interactions were contemplated. Whether the learning experiences created cognitive challenge and extended conversations was considered. The nature of the learning experiences and the materials themselves were discussed along with the process of conducting the group learning experiences. Finally, the importance of professional preparation which underpins professional practice was outlined.

Smith (1991, p.95) suggested that episodes of joint attention could be an important "micro indicator of quality in early childhood environments". On the basis of the findings, it is clear that SGLEs encapsulate many features of quality, from

organisation and management to individual interactions, and as such can be regarded as a key indicator of the standard of practice in a setting.

It would appear that the nature of the pedagogy in this study was characterised by positive interpersonal relationships. This quality of relationships in the three settings is heartening. However, as Adams et al. (2004, p. 27) argued, when children appear "demonstrably secure, happy, confident, even joyful, it is not necessarily an easy task to ask oneself whether they are, in fact, experiencing a challenging and worthwhile curriculum". In the settings studied here, reflection on this question could enhance the learning experiences as part of regular review of practice.

Socio-cultural theory emphasises the importance of adult engagement. Rogoff (1998, p. 689) suggests that "by participating in shared endeavours in socio-cultural activity, the individual is continually in the process of developing and using their understanding". Learning happens through interactions. The nature of the interactions to facilitate thinking and language were limited as were the SGLEs themselves. Generally, these findings imply that educators need to pay attention to the provision of the SGLEs they offer, the meaningfulness of them and the potential of those experiences to enhance children's thinking and language. Educators also need to pay attention to conducting their SGLEs in order to maximise their potential for EPCs. To do so effectively, educators need to be skilled in the use of interactions.

Chapter 7 draws on the first three chapters to make recommendations based on the implications of this study and to present a conclusion.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The structure of this chapter falls within four main parts. First, the chapter considers some constraints which could inhibit EPCs from a policy perspective. This consideration is followed by recommendations. Second, constraints from a practice perspective are advanced and recommendations are suggested. Thirdly, the challenges of this type of research and the benefits of the methodology adopted are addressed, and recommendations for future research are proposed. Some final reflections are offered. The chapter now begins with a focus on policy.

The Nature of the Interactions - Policy

Educational inequality exists in Ireland (Baker, 2005; Kellaghan, 2001; Lynch, 1999). There has been a consensus amongst educationalists since the early 60s that educational inequality should be addressed at a policy level by the State (Kellaghan, 2001; NESC, 1993). The literature is consistent in advising that intervention in the earliest years of a child's development yield the greatest gains. In that context, in order to combat educational inequality, an integrated alignment of all resources (economic, social, cultural, emotional and educational) relating to early childhood education must be achieved, resulting in high quality ECEC settings. A key indicator of a high quality ECEC setting is the achievement of EPCs. Arguably, the achievement of desirable interactions as identified by this study is impeded by failures within the Irish ECEC policy landscape. Some of these failures, which have distracted from the critical importance of extended purposive conversations between educators and young children in areas designated as disadvantaged, are now considered.

Constraints within the Policy Landscape

A dichotomy between care and education

A dichotomy between childcare and education persists despite nuanced and comprehensive arguments advising various governments towards a unified, integrated and coordinated approach to ECEC policy and planning (Hayes & Bradley, 2009; OECD, 2006). This 'split system', common to the early development of ECEC internationally, has been criticised in a UNESCO report (Kaga et al., 2010). Policy development in Ireland has been fragmented by the split system. This is manifested in the titles and funding streams of the variety of service provision. '*Childcare*' refers to ECEC in the diversity of settings both public and private where parents share the care of their children with others and in general are funded through the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP). '*Child Care*' refers to settings partly funded or directly provided by the HSE and/or the NCIP. These settings have as their main aim the protection of children at risk and early intervention. Children usually require a referral from the HSE to access these settings. '*Early education*' refers to settings directly funded by the DES. A further manifestation of the division between care and education can be seen in relation to the variety of terminology in the sector.

In comparison to primary schooling the lack of clarity in the terminology used to define the field of ECEC is reflected in the diversity of titles for ECEC educators. For example, 'childcare worker', 'play group leader', and 'pre-school teacher' are some of the titles given to ECEC educators. A split system dichotomises what should be a holistic approach to the needs of children and families. Children need to be engaged in enriching early childhood education experiences and families need to access high-quality care for their children while they access training or work.

The traditional designation of the role as 'childcare worker' may be one of the reasons why the educators in this study placed more emphasis on the relational aspects of their valuable work rather than extending thinking and supporting children's language and cognitive development to a higher level of competence. Another reason may be the deficit perspective that the educators appear to maintain regarding the families of the children in the settings (see Chapter 2 Theoretical Responses to Educational Inequality and Chapter 5 What Supports or Hinders Interactions). Furthermore, the literature highlights the significance of language, power and social reproduction which points to a lack of any incentive to embrace change on behalf of the advantaged policy makers and their dominant orthodoxy (Baker et al, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986). This is further compounded by a reduced level of financial resources due to the economic recession.

State investment of the *Free Pre-School Year* (OMCYA, 2009b), the implementation of practice frameworks (CECDE, 2006a; NCCA, 2009a) and the *Workforce Development Plan* (DES, 2011) are policy developments of significance to this thesis, and are now considered.

State Investment in ECEC

The importance of high quality ECEC has been emphasised throughout this study. It is particularly significant in areas designated as disadvantaged. Some children growing up in these areas commence school with "competencies and dispositions which differ from the competencies and dispositions which are valued in schools and which are required to facilitate adaptation to school and school learning" (Kellaghan, 2001, p. 5). High quality ECEC provision can support children to engage successfully with the

demands of school (Schweinhart et al., 2004). NESC (2009) endorsed the expansion of the provision of ECEC towards universal access. Targeted interventions in areas of disadvantage, ensuring adequate investment, improving quality, and having good coordination were also endorsed (NESC, 2009). The question of how a universal ECEC programme could benefit those in areas of poverty could reasonably be asked. NESC argued:

> ...that an approach that provides services for everyone but with a differential subsidy structure, which enables families at different income levels to access the same service ('tailored universalism') would optimise the coverage and quality of early childhood care and education services. (NESC, 2009, p. 35)

There is merit in that argument, as is evidenced in the UK experience (Pugh, 2010). There are initiatives in Ireland which address the cost of childcare and or early childhood education in relation to those who can afford it least. Whereas it is beyond the remit of this thesis to examine issues of access, issues of quality and the focus of targeted interventions are very pertinent.

As stated in Chapter 1 "pre-primary education is considered the most important level of education in an individual's cognitive development, as educational progress is cumulative for most individuals" (NCC, 2009, p. 12). For three and four year old children the universal provision of a pre-school year could be seen as a landmark development extending an education provision already enjoyed by the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education (NCC, 2009). It has the potential to strengthen the structural and conceptual integration of education and care, afford an opportunity to reflect on ECEC policy, practice and pedagogy and to locate children and their rights at the centre of policy-making (Hayes, 2010). However, universal provision which stems from a liberal equality of opportunity perspective will not achieve equality

of education for children living in poverty. The impact of the universal pre-school year will depend on how carefully it is planned, resourced and implemented, particularly in areas designated as disadvantaged. In these areas, respect for difference and educational equality will be required in educator's practice to release the children's potential (Baker et al., 2004). Equality of condition in education requires an egalitarian approach which, in addition to other things, demands that children's first language, or dialect, or accent should be accepted and valued. "To do less is to devalue the pupil who speaks it and, by implication, the cultural group from whom he or she has learned it – that is what turns linguistic difference into linguistic disadvantage" (Wells & Nicholls, 1985, p.15).

Given the finite resources and competing demands, it is logical that policy makers direct resources to those factors that make the greatest difference to children's outcomes. We know from research that improved social and cognitive outcomes are achievable in high quality ECEC settings in areas of educational inequality (See Chapters 1 and 3, Schweinhart et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). These outcomes are achieved by effective educators who interact positively with each child, supported with professional development, reflective supervision, and good financial remuneration (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Therefore high quality ECEC costs.

However, investing in accessible, high quality, intensive ECEC provisions for young children living in poverty is socially and economically profitable (Heckman, 2006; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). In the current economic climate, with greatly restricted financial resources, the realisation of the investment in ECEC is not only paramount; it could be seen as a saving to the exchequer. Achievement of the potential economic return is only possible if the learning and development of the children in the settings are fully realised. For that to be achieved ECEC standards must be set, and set high.

Implementation of Practice Frameworks

In this section two points are made (a) the importance of the implementation of *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009a), and (b) the importance of evaluating and curtailing services that don't measure up to required standards.

Beneficial effects of ECEC for all children, and in particular for children living with poverty, depend on high quality interactions of educators and children. That is, interactions that support emotional security, are responsive to children, are cognitively stimulating, which scaffold children's learning and encourage conversation. The requirement in the guidelines for the *Free Pre-School Year* is that "services must agree to provide an appropriate educational programme for children in their pre-school year, which adheres to the principles of *Síolta*, the national framework for early years care and education" (OMCYA, 2009c, p. 2). Whilst there is no document from the OMCYA at the time of writing that clearly stipulates compliance with *Aistear*, it is stated that "information on the interaction of Síolta, Aistear and Regulation 5 will be co-ordinated by the OMCYA" (OMCYA, Circular 1, 2009). Adherence to the principles of *Síolta* and *Aistear* should produce identifiable outcomes in relation to social, language and cognitive learning and development of children attending those services. These outcomes are achievable through educator-child interactions. *Aistear* and *Síolta* signify the importance of interactions. Therefore, both of these frameworks, if implemented, may support educators to enhance children's language and thinking.

In the US, Burchinal et al. (2010) recommended that if the goal of a setting is to improve social and cognitive outcomes, and settings were judged to be below the threshold of medium quality, then state funding should be removed from those settings.

Burchinal et al. also recommended that funding for quality enhancement programmes (that is professional development programmes) could also be removed if they don't demonstrate the desired impacts on improving the quality of the interactions. Whilst acknowledging that Ireland presents a different socio-cultural context to the US, these recommendations have merit. Culturally appropriate evaluation tools could be devised, drawing from those already used in large scale evaluations of settings in Ireland (see Appendix 2 PEIP). These would be suitable for use by ECEC educators to aid reflection of practice. Further workforce development is also necessary.

Workforce Development Plan

Status of ECEC Sector

There is a sense that the status of the early childhood sector has a negative impact on the professional identity of staff, recruitment and retention (Moloney, 2010). Despite the importance of their role, early childhood educators are among the lowest paid workers in Ireland (NCNA, 2010). The sector has not been remunerated to the same level as the primary, secondary or tertiary sector. The semantics and confusion about the sector, and the relative denigration of the sector as engaged in 'play' or 'care' further undermines it (Maloney, 2010).

In addition, up to recent years the sector did not have a graduate workforce. While degree programmes are more readily available, it will take some time and additional resources to embed the professionalisation of the sector. The *Workforce Development Plan* (DES, 2011) focuses on access to education and training programmes for early childhood educators. It articulates a vision for the development of the workforce. It aspires to support the much-needed professionalisation of the sector. It is acknowledged in the background paper to the *Workforce Development Plan* that the "centrality of a

highly skilled, knowledgeable and competent adult supporting children's early learning and development, is also a fundamental premise upon which *Síolta* and *Aistear* are built" (DES, 2009a, p. 8). Ireland needs a workforce skilled in ECEC, supported in their reflective practice and professional development. With the development of the Association of Childcare Professionals there are positive moves in this direction.

Recommendations for Policy

It is imperative that any state investment in ECEC, in all areas but particularly in areas designated as disadvantaged, results in the provision of high quality learning experiences for young children. These experiences should be led by professional educators who cognitively stimulate and engage children in EPCs. It is further recommended that:

- A national policy is developed whereby a unified high quality education and care system is designed to address intergenerational cycles of poverty (as discussed in Chapter 2). The literature suggests that to address 'generational' poverty, intergenerational education is the key. It can take a number of generations to successfully overcome the perpetuation of patterns of educational inequality. ECEC is a good place to start. Parents can avail of training or employment opportunities, while their children attend high quality ECEC. Educators and parents can share information about the children's early learning and how best to optimise their development. Such actions have proven to benefit children's social and cognitive outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).
- The *Free Pre-School Year* scheme should be subject to critical evaluation in relation to the extent to which children in areas designated as disadvantaged

attend the scheme and the quality of the learning opportunities and specifically the quality of the interactions. The scheme has significant potential to counteract educational inequality (Smyth & McCoy, 2009).

- Settings availing of the *Free Pre-School Year* in areas of disadvantage (and elsewhere) require special attention to their practices in order to maximise the benefits for the children. As illustrated in this study of interactions in SGLEs, educators need extra support in developing the pedagogical skills associated with extended purposive conversations with young children.
- The guidelines on interactions as part of *Aistear* produced by the NCCA (2009b), strengthened by the standard on *Interactions* of *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006a), should be reinforced in settings availing of the *Free Pre-School Year* scheme. Settings should be supported by the State to implement the frameworks.
- Settings should be supported to set goals to improve social and cognitive outcomes for children. Ongoing professional development and support are critical in the implementation of any curriculum or framework.
- The Association of Childcare Professionals could be renamed The Association of Early Childhood Educators and Childcare Professionals.

The Nature of the Interactions - Practice

The quality of children's learning is powerfully affected by "the quality of the interaction through which that learning is mediated" (Wells & Nicholls, 1985, p. 18). This research has pointed to the importance of the quantity and quality of extended purposive conversations. EPCs between educators and children were rare in the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, see Chapter 3 Opportunities to Enable Episodes of

Shared Thinking). The results of this study indicate that EPCs were rare in the settings observed. The question could be raised as to whether it is reasonable to expect to observe such conversations in the research sites. Constraints to these conversations have been outlined in Chapters 5 and 6. There could be a broad range of further constraints inhibiting EPCs including the resources available; the time; the educator-child ratios, the duration of the SGLEs, the speech and language delays of some children, the location of the SGLEs and the professional preparation of the educators.

Constraints which Potentially Inhibit Extended Purposive Conversations

Resources

All settings observed were well furnished and equipped with appropriate furniture and equipment. They were well maintained and child-centred. However, one of the three educators was employed only part-time. This suggests that the setting had insufficient financial resources to employ a full-time educator. Critically all three settings relied on annualised funding which was precarious and may have an impact on the dynamics and priorities from a management point of view. Concerns over funding may distract from ensuring that children receive the best possible learning experiences.

Time

The issue of time as a resource is also relevant. In Rowan and Birch, time may have constrained ECEC practice, particularly in relation to planning. The part-time nature of Katie's work in Rowan further constrained the opportunities for planning. Team planning and evaluation regarding collaboration for, and delivery of, complementary SGLEs is an integral part of professional practice in any ECEC setting.

Educator-child Ratios

An assumption could be made, borne out by research (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), that the smaller the group the greater the likelihood of EPCs. In this study, Rachel had eight children in her group, Sarah had six and Katie had five. However, as is clear from Figure 16 Analysis of episode of conversations, Rachel also engaged in the most episodes of conversations (those of 'initiation, response, feedback', drawing from Alexander, 2008). This finding suggests that the ability to engage in EPCs may have as much to do with pedagogical organisation and the pedagogical skill of the practitioner as the educator: child ratios.

Duration

In relation to the impact of the duration of an experience on the interactions, no clear pattern emerged from this study. The duration of the SGLEs ranged from 17 minutes to 43 minutes (see Table 4). The most promising and extended conversation was in the activity 'Exploring fish'. This SGLE was also one of the shortest experiences (at 22 minutes). This finding implies that the combination of educator skill and first-hand and open-ended experiences are more critical in supporting extended conversations than the duration of the SGLE.

Speech and language delay of children

Considerations of the speech and language delays of some of the children in the study must be included. However, seminal studies of two year old children suggest that children's language abilities are enhanced by the frequency with which adults listen to, interpret and extend the meaning expressed in the child's previous utterance (Wells, 1985b). In those studies success was dependant on the qualities of the interaction

strategies of the adult and was independent of the child's speech and language challenges including deafness (Wood, undated, cited in Wells, 1985b).

Location allocated to SGLEs

The physical location of the SGLEs may present constraints to engaging in EPCs. The experiences, with the exception of Cherry, were conducted in a shared space, typical of most ECEC settings. The SGLEs were conducted at tables closely adjacent to each other. The location of the SGLEs in restrictive spaces possibly frustrated opportunities for EPCs. This implies that attention should be paid to separating the locations of the experiences from each other and considering using the outdoors for some SGLEs.

Arguably the ratios, the amount of time available and the location of the SGLEs negatively impacts on the potential for EPCs. Other constraints on the educators could be their limited experience (see Table 8) and indeed their individual capacities and capabilities. The skill of the educator would appear to be the most significant factor in the development of EPCs. This has implications for their professional preparation.

Professional Preparation

The outcomes in relation to children's social and cognitive development were directly related to the training of the early childhood educators in the REPEY settings, (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). In this study the same finding applies. The most educated and experienced educator engaged in the most EPCs. There have been reservations about the standards and variations of qualifications awarded by FETAC in early childhood education (DES, 2009b, see discussion in Chapter 6). Since Rachel (Cherry)

and Sarah (Birch) were qualified to a Level 8, the findings of this study imply that attention must also be paid to the content of all ECEC training programmes.

Consistent with Adams et al. (2004), the three educators engaged in the kind of interaction strategies that build relationships and develop children socially, which is essential to ECEC pedagogical practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; David et al., 2002; Hohmann et al., 2008; NCCA, 2009b). These strategies which support building relationships include physical caring, affirming/encouraging, redirecting, supporting peer relationships among others. However, research evidence emphasises that early childhood programmes must focus on social and cognitive development equally, in order to have a positive impact on children at risk of social exclusion and educational disadvantage (Bowman et al., 2001; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The selected SGLEs in this study appeared to be characterised by a paucity of interactions (such as scaffolding, demonstrating, open-ended questions) which are associated with facilitating children's thinking and language and which would engage the educators and the children in episodes of extended purposive conversation. Research is unequivocal in encouraging educators to engage young children in extended and elaborate conversation (Alexander, 2008; Moyles et al., 2002a; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Wells, 1982, 1985a).

Recommendations for ECEC Practice and Professional Preparation

- Managers within ECEC settings need to enable staff teams and individuals to plan and set broad learning objectives for the children in scheduled SGLEs. Educators need to plan to proactively engage children in EPCs. Educators also

need to reflect on their interaction strategies and rigorously evaluate their practice.

- Critical attention should be given to the content and delivery of professional preparation of early childhood educators. Professional preparation should be informed by and rooted in the Irish frameworks for quality and curriculum.
- It seems logical that in order to enhance children's cognitive, social and linguistic development, an emphasis on why and how to engage children in extended purposive conversations should be an intrinsic part of professional preparation. Educators should be supported to engage in extended purposive conversations with young children. Appropriate training programmes should be developed.
- The analysis of the findings in this research identified that the balance of the educators' interactions should be tipped in favour of those that enhance children's thinking and language. This implies that the content of training programmes for ECEC educators should similarly emphasise developing children's thinking and language, as well as their emotional development and social skills.
- A pedagogy of conversation should prevail in settings where children are listened to with intentionality. Authentic opportunities for children's thinking and language to emerge should be created (Rinaldi, 2006). Children are competent learners who are expert in their own lives and learning and merit more active and equal participation in conversations (Rinaldi; Devine, 2000). Professional preparation should emphasise educators' role as co-constructors of children's learning as well as their nurturing role as carers.

- In order to improve the outcomes for children's learning and development, educators need thorough grounding in the theoretical principles underpinning practice and skills in interactions. The understandings in relation to early learning and development that need to be foregrounded are how children learn and develop through active exploration and participation in every day experiences (Rogoff, 1998).
- Literature reviewed (Durden & Dangel 2008; Smith, 1999) and the findings in this study suggest that scheduled SGLEs may provide ideal opportunities to encourage EPCs. This study elucidates the importance of scheduled SGLEs as a vehicle for educators to engage in EPCs. On the basis of the analysis of findings of this research, it is clear that SGLEs encapsulate many features of quality from organisation and management to individual interactions between educators and children and as such are a key indicator of the standard of practice in a setting (Smith 1999). Thus SGLEs could become a focus as part of overall evaluation procedures in ECEC settings. Furthermore, this study could assist educators to design and thus realise the full potential of SGLEs.
- Educators need grounding in how to encourage and maintain young children's natural curiosity, creativity, wonder and reflection (Rich et al. 2005), in addition to creating "common knowledge" in first-hand SGLEs. Educators need understanding in relation to tapping into children's lived experiences (Tayler, 2001). Attention should be paid by ECEC educators to the content, delivery and location of the SGLEs to maximise EPCs.
- SGLEs should build on children's interests and be meaningful. SGLEs should maximise educator-child collaborations in experiences that provide children with opportunities to engage in extended purposive conversation, thereby enabling

them to extend current knowledge, skills and language to a higher level of competence (Stremmel & Fu, 1993).

Research Methodology – Challenges and Benefits

The significance of interactions in relation to enhancing children's learning and development is uncontested in Ireland (CECDE, 2006a; CECDE, 2006b; Dunphy, 2008; NCCA, 2009b). However, despite this interest there is a dearth of research on moment-to-moment interactions between educators and children of three and four years of age (see Chapter 3). Possible reasons for this, as emerged in this particular study, are the intrusive nature of this type of research and the time required to transcribe and analyse the data. This combined with the sheer volume of data that is gathered and the consequent demands of the analysis creates a challenge in undertaking such research. This thesis offers a unique understanding as to how ECEC is enacted by the educators in the research sites.

The choice of case study research strategy was validated by the insight gained into the three educators' practice in the bounded situation of the SGLEs and by the depth of the data gathered. The strategy allowed for the examination of processes and relationships. Critically, it allowed for the observation and subsequent examination of practice in its natural context.

Whereas the settings and the educators differed, there was consistency in the findings across the three settings, in relation to the emphasis placed by the educators on interactions to enhance social development. The line-by-line analysis of selected SGLEs revealed the extensive use of closed-ended questions, in addition to the lack of cognitive

challenge. This analysis provides a picture of practice that could not be obtained by observation alone. The Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule (ECICS, see Appendix 6) and the use of Excel contributed to the development of research tools for coding videotaped interactions in naturalistic settings. The use of film-stimulated reflective dialogues provides an extra explanatory dimension to the observations and contributed to the research findings. Film-stimulated reflective dialogues could be considered as strategy to enhance ECEC practice.

It is acknowledged that this is a small study of limited scale and duration. It could be argued that this study is but a glimpse of practice in three settings. However, the methods employed demonstrated that it is possible to capture the data; and that doing so is worthwhile. The consistency of the findings across the three settings would suggest that extrapolation of the findings would not be unreasonable.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that further research could involve:

- Examining the content of ECEC training programmes in the HETAC and FETAC sectors, and how factors such as training, role preparation, confidence as professionals, experience and reflection are linked to educator's abilities to extend children's thinking and language.
- An action research project, involving the design, development and implementation of a training programme on enabling extended purposive conversations between educators and young children. Film-stimulated reflective dialogues could be used prior to, during and after the implementation of training.

- The outcomes of evidenced based research in ECEC should inform policy and practice. Evidence based policy-making requires appraisal mechanisms. Policy makers could direct resources to those factors that make the biggest difference to children's outcomes. Interactions to enhance social and cognitive development make the biggest difference to the outcomes for young children living in disadvantaged communities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule (see Appendix 6) could be employed as an assessment tool in research to develop a mechanism for appraisal of the effectiveness of practice in a given setting.

Concluding Comments

The importance of early childhood education for all children, but particularly for those living with the injustice of poverty, has been emphasised throughout this research. This research adopted a socio-cultural framework located within the field of effective pedagogy and educational equality to analyse interactions in scheduled SGLEs. The central question focused on the nature of the pedagogy within those experiences. Moment-to-moment interactions between the three educators and their small groups of three to four year old children attending early childhood settings in areas designated as disadvantaged in Ireland were explored. Educators' perceptions on what informs their interactions were sought on two occasions.

Research asserts that adults engaging children in 'extended purposive conversations' result in high cognitive outcomes for the children (Schaffer, 1996; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008a). These conversations are particularly

important for improving the outcomes for children at risk of educational inequality and social exclusion. However, there appears to be a dissonance between the theory that suggests that EPCs advance children's developmental progress, and the application of that theory in practice. This research provides a new perspective on interactions in the selected ECEC settings in Ireland. This perspective was achieved using a case study approach and provides insight into the practice of early childhood education and care.

This study uniquely addresses certain research gaps identified in relation to professional practice in ECEC in Ireland, in particular in relation to interactions in three selected research sites (McGough et al., 2006; Walsh & Cassidy, 2007). The methods used established the benefits of undertaking observations through film and audio recording and discussions aided by film-stimulated reflective dialogues. Using the data gleaned from the research process, the study has demonstrated that the educators in the three settings were skilled at supporting the children's social development in the SGLEs. This study has also highlighted that the educators in the three settings did not adequately focus their interactions on supporting children's cognitive and language development.

Enhancing children's early childhood educational experiences is one element of policy and practice which will address one of our most deep-rooted problems in Ireland, that of educational inequality. Investment in ECEC can reap positive benefits for children at risk of educational inequality. However, investment alone will not necessarily improve child outcomes. This aspiration can only be made a reality through effective implementation of national quality and curriculum frameworks in ECEC settings, professionalisation of the sector and improved professional preparation

focussing on extension of children's thinking and language skills as well as their social skills.

There is every reason to be optimistic about ECEC in Ireland in 2011. ECEC policy is moving in a positive direction. The educators' caring attitudes as observed created loving relationships with the children. This is an important first step towards EPCs. It is hoped that this research conveys the importance of these conversations.

As stated earlier a radical egalitarian approach to equality is ambitious, challenging and offers an alternative to the liberal perspective of equality of opportunity. However, such an approach will take enormous political, social and structural change which will take time. Nevertheless, there is a moral and ethical imperative in these recessionary times that the focus of public spending on education is on reducing inequalities, not simply compensating for disadvantage. With an egalitarian approach in place, in the words of Seamus Heaney, the "longed-for tidal wave of justice" will rise and the "hope for a great sea-change" will happen; "a further shore is reachable from here" (Heaney, 1990, p.77).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Context and Departmental Responsibility/Programmes for ECEC

Setting the Context for ECEC

Setting the Political and Socio-economic Context for ECEC

Ireland is an independent state, enjoying a parliamentary democracy within the legislative boundary of a written Constitution (1937). Policy implementation is the responsibility of the civil service, central administration comprising of Government departments; autonomous state agencies, for example the National Economic and Social Council (NESC); an elected local Government, and a model of centralised collective bargaining known as social partnership (OECD, 2004). The partners include representatives from the farming community, voluntary and statutory organisations, the business community and the trade unions. The NESC (2005) undertook the first major review of Ireland's liberal welfare state and a new framework for reform. That review informs Ireland's partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (Ireland, 2006).

Ireland has experienced profound economic, demographic, cultural and social change since the 1990s. An improvement in public finances through economic and employment growth, manufacturing output and export growth has been experienced (Ireland, 2007a). However, in 2008 Ireland's economy experienced a shift from a high rate of growth to a major recession. A national crisis in banking and a sharp rise in Government borrowing to finance revenue deficits precipitated severe cuts in public expenditure (Hayes & Bradley, 2009). As a result extensive restructuring of public policy, in particular in relation to ECEC, has taken place (Minister for Finance, 2009).

The population in Ireland have increased by over 12% to four and a half million in the period 1995-2009 (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2009a). Within the same period,

the number of births has reached a new high of 74,500 per annum. According to the most recent statistics available, Ireland has more children under the age of six years than at any time since 1896 (CSO, 2009a). The following section outlines the stark statistics on child poverty.

Children Living in Poverty

Ireland is a classical liberal (free market) economy characterised by relatively low tax intake and Government spending. A further characteristic is manifested by the *Child Poverty Rates in Rich Countries* (UNICEF, 2005 cited in NESC, 2009) which ranked Ireland as seventeenth on their poverty index of twenty industrialised countries; indicating a large gap between the rich and the poor. Child poverty is a feature of countries with high income inequality such as Ireland (NESC, 2009). The most recent statistics on child poverty emanate from the *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (CSO, 2009b). In 2008, 6.3% of all children of 17 years of age and under were living in consistent poverty[10] and 18% were at risk of poverty[11]. This percentage equates to more than 190,000 children. Given more recent unemployment statistics, child poverty is likely to rise. Anna Visser, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPNI), pointed out that the survey covers the period from December 2007 to December 2008. The statistics may not reflect the current situation. There were 170,000 people signing on the live unemployment register in December 2007 (EAPN1, 2010). In September 2010 there were 442,417 people signing on (CSO, 2010).

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[10] Consistent Poverty means having an income below 60% of the median and also experiencing enforced deprivation. Enforced deprivation means not being able to afford basic necessities such as new clothes, not having the money to buy food such as meat or fish, not being able to heat your home, or having to go into debt to pay ordinary household bills.

[11] At Risk of Poverty means living in families whose income was below 60% of median income. In 2008, that was an income of below €239.50 a week for an adult.

Mirroring the dramatic changes to our socio-economic context in Ireland, there have been unprecedented developments in ECEC legislation, policy, and programmes since the early 1990s.

Setting the Legislation and Policy Context

Particularly relevant to the development of ECEC in Ireland are the *Child Care Act, 1991* (Ireland, 1991) led by the then Department of Health; the *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (1999) and the *Education Act, 1998* (Ireland, 1998) both led by the then Department of Education and Science (DES); and the *National Childcare Strategy,* led by the then Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR, 1999). The legislation and policy initiatives are located in their original departments and their significance explained below[12].

Legislation and policy initiatives for three and four year old children living with poverty are driven by three main policy agendas. The agendas are the protection of children, labour force equality, and educational disadvantage. These were led respectively by the Department of Health (now Health and Children [DHC]), the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (now Justice and Law Reform [DJLR]), and the Department of Education and Science (now Education and Skills [DES]).

Department of Health (and Children)

The process leading to Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC (1992) was the stimulus for the creation of policy whose main mission was the protection of children.

[12] See Appendix 1 for a detailed and historical map of departmental sections, responsibilities and programmes with particular reference to three and four year old children living in areas of disadvantage.

This was manifested in the *Child Care Act 1991*(Ireland, 1991). The Department of Health (DH) was charged with implementing the *Act. Part VII of Child Care Act, 1991* (published in 1996 and amended in 1997) which relates directly to early childhood settings in the voluntary, community and private sector. It has been argued that this established ECEC as a serious policy matter (Hayes, 2007). It was certainly the first time that a context for regulating these settings was established and an attempt made to apply national standards by the DH through the Health Boards. However, there was quite a time lag from the publication of the *Act* (1991) to the delivery of the regulations which related to early childhood settings (*Child Care [Pre-school Settings] Regulations,* DH, 1996).

Department of Justice (Equality) and Law Reform

At the same time as the delivery of the *Preschool Regulations* a further significant policy development occurred. *Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness* (1996 – 2000), provided for the establishment of an Expert Working Group on Childcare. This was precipitated by the increased participation in employment by women which created a subsequent demand for childcare places. The Group, established in 1997, was chaired by the DJELR in order to devise a National Framework for the Development of the Childcare Sector. The outcome of its work was recorded in the *National Childcare Strategy* (DJELR, 1999). The strategy concentrated on stimulating supply (of childcare places) and supporting demand (affording parents opportunity to access childcare settings). Programme funding was obtained from the EU and was overseen by the Childcare Directorate (DJELR) and named the *Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 to 2006* (EOCP). The main aim of this programme was to enable parents to avail of training, education and employment

opportunities through the provision of childcare supports. This was necessary as communities and areas of disadvantage are characterised by families who may experience unemployment, a high risk of poverty and low educational attainment. Furthermore, these family characteristics may have persisted over many generations (Kellaghan, 2002). In 2006, the EOCP was replaced by the *National Childcare Investment Programme* (NCIP) which is now exchequer funded.

Department of Education and Science (now Skills)

The National Forum for Early Childhood Education was convened by the Minister for Education and Science and took place in March 1998. It was a consultative process for all interested groups to engage in dialogue towards the development of a national framework for early childhood education. This led directly to the creation of *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (DES, 1999). The provision of education and care for children in the age range from birth to six years of age was under consideration. According to the National Forum Secretariat (1998) this was consistent with international and national thinking. As stated in the *White Paper* (*Education [Welfare] Bill, 1999* [Ireland, 1999]) children in Ireland are obliged to attend school in their sixth year. In order to pursue the objectives of the *White Paper*, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was launched in 2002 (www.cecde.ie). The aim of the CECDE was to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in relation to children younger than six years. The CECDE was to be the forerunner to the anticipated Early Childhood Agency.

The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

In December 2005, the Government announced the establishment of a Junior Minister with responsibility for children with a seat (but without voting rights) at Cabinet, housed in the Office of the Minister for Children, and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). With the establishment of the new Government in April 2011, a full Ministry has been created. Located in the Department of Health and Children (DHC), the OMCYA aims to maintain a general strategic oversight and co-ordination of bodies with responsibility for developing and delivering children's services. The OMCYA comprises of personnel working on childcare (from the Childcare Directorate, of the then Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), on child welfare and child protection (from the DHC) and from the National Children's Office (NCO). In response to recommendations regarding early childhood education (National Forum Secretariat, 1998; OECD, 2004; NESF, 2005), the DES established an Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) which is co-located within the OMCYA. The EYEPU was charged with responsibility for targeted early intervention programmes such as *Early Start*, *Traveller Pre-Schools*, the *DEIS* initiative (DES, 2005); the *Workforce Development Plan* (previously entitled the *National Childcare Training Strategy* [CECDE, 2008]) and implementation of *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006a). In 2005 there was a significant development, which was an initiative towards co-ordination of ECEC policy when the Office of the Minister for Children was established. The name of the office was later changed to include youth affairs.

Figure 20 below illustrates the drivers of ECEC policy regarding the hierarchy and relations between the Government departments and offices. It includes the NCCA

who advise the Government in relation to curriculum matters. It illustrates the initiatives and in which office they sit.

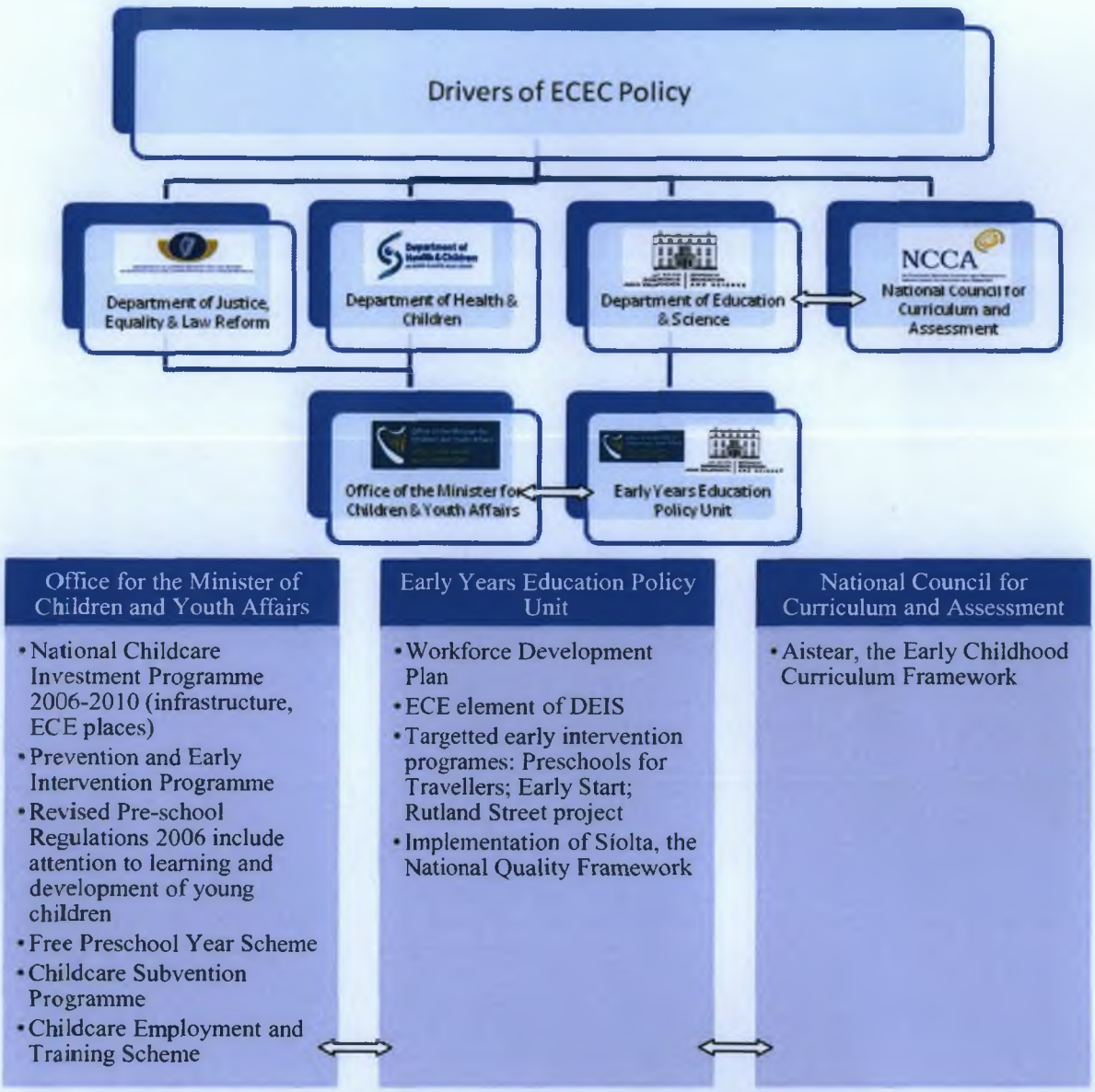


Figure 20 ECEC Drivers of policy development - Programme & practice initiatives at a glance

Departmental Map Responsibility/Programmes for ECEC with particular reference to young children living in areas designated as disadvantaged			
Department	**Health and Children**	**Justice, Equality and Law Reform**	**Education and Science**
Main Policy Agenda	Protection of children	Labour force equality	Educational disadvantage
Legislation	Part VII of Child Care Act, 1991 (1996, 1997) Child Care (Pre-School Services)(No2) Regulations 2006 Children Act, 2001	Overarching Partnership agreement then *Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness* (1996 – 2000); now *Towards 2016* (2006-2015)	Education Act, 1998 (where it pertains to early childhood in primary schools) White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999)
Policy Initiatives	▪ Review of Health Services leading to ▪ The Children's Agenda (2007) ▪ National Children's Strategy ▪	▪ Expert Working Group on Childcare. The outcome was -*The National Childcare Strategy* (1999)	▪ National Forum on Early Education (1998) outcome: OECD review on ECEC ▪ *DEIS* Early education strand (DES, 2005)
Principal Responsibility	▪ Child Health Services ▪ Regulation of pre-school facilities (voluntary, community and private sector) ▪ Provision of childcare places for children from families under stress ▪ Support services for children with disabilities ▪ Driving the implementation of the National Children's Strategy	▪ Chair of National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (up to 2005, see below) ▪ Establishment and funding of County Childcare Committees ▪ Management and Administration of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 to 2006	▪ Measures for children at risk of educational disadvantage ▪ Funding, managing and inspection of infant classes in primary schools. ▪ Funding, managing and inspection of specific measures to address educational disadvantage in primary schools
Sections / Structures	▪ National Children's Office ▪ Child Care Policy Unit ▪ Child Care Legislation Unit ▪ Children's Services policy , 2007 ▪ Disability Services ▪ Community Health Division	▪ Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Group ▪ National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC) ▪ Certifying Bodies Sub-Group of the NCCC	▪ Primary Section(s) Inspectorate ▪ Social Inclusion Unit ▪ Educational Disadvantaged Committee ▪ Educational Disadvantaged Forum

Department	Health and Children	Justice and Law Reform	Education and Skills
Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs (OMCYA) Lead office for children established from 2005 **Structures**	▪ Child Welfare and Protection Policy Unit ▪ National Children and Young People's Strategy Unit ▪ Interdepartmental Group of Assistant Secretaries ▪ Childcare Directorate (from 2007 on) ▪ Chair of National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (from 2005 on)	▪ Co-located Youth Justice Service Policy Unit ▪ Childcare Directorate (moved to OMC) ▪ Chair of National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (moved to OMC)	▪ Co-located Early Years Education Policy Unit
Principal Responsibility of OMC	▪ The Agenda for Children's Services ▪ The National Childcare Strategy 2006 - 2010 ▪ Implementation of the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP, replacing Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme) ▪ To increase the supply of affordable, quality childcare in Ireland through the administration of the capital and staffing grants under the: NCIP 2006 – 2010 ▪ To fund and support the City/County Childcare Committees in enhancing the quality of childcare in Ireland ▪ To collaborate on cross-cutting childcare policy issues ▪ To implement the Child Care (Pre-School Services)(No2) Regulations 2006 ▪ Free Pre-School Year, Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme ▪ Community Childcare Subvention Scheme ▪ Childcare Employment and Training Scheme ▪ National Early Years Access Initiative		▪ Workforce Development Plan to meet the target of providing 17,000 childcare training places by 2010; ▪ Implementing the recommendations of the Traveller Education Strategy in moving towards integrated provision for Traveller pre-schools; ▪ Early Start ▪ Implementing the *DEIS* action plan for early childhood education ▪ Implementing *Siolta, the Early Childhood Quality Framework* ▪ Liaising with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in relation to *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework
Agencies	▪ Health Service Executives ▪ Health Information and Quality Authority		

Department	Health and Children	Education and Skills
Principal Family Support and ECEC Programmes	▪ Core child health surveillance programme for 0-12 age group *Best Health for Children* ▪ Springboard Initiative ▪ Community Mothers Programme ▪ Home-Start ▪ Family Support Workers ▪ Community Child Care Workers ▪ Pre-and After-School Nurseries ▪ National Children's Strategy research - Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland ▪ (10,000 children from birth, 8,000 from 9 years to adulthood, joint responsibility with Department of Social and Family Affairs) ▪ *Ready Steady Play* National Play Policy ▪ Prevention and Early Intervention Programme	▪ Early Start Programme incorporating the Rutland Street Project ▪ Pre-Schools for Traveller Children ▪ Primary School Infant Classes, including Special Classes for Children with Learning Disabilities ▪ Giving Children an Even Break ▪ Designated Disadvantaged Areas Scheme ▪ Support Teacher Project ▪ Visiting Teachers for Travellers ▪ Resource Teachers for Travellers ▪ School Completion Programme ▪ Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme ▪ Learning Support / Resource Teachers ▪ English language provision for Non-Nationals ▪ School Development Planning ▪ National Educational Psychological Scheme

Appendix 2 ECEC in Designated Areas of Disadvantage: DEIS, Early Start, PEIP

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

In May 2005, the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hannifin, launched *DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.* In the plan it is stated that the Department's particular contribution to early childhood education provision (for children in the year before they start school) "...will be to provide funding or part-funding for the educational dimension of provision, where new [childcare and education] places are involved, and on supporting the further development of an educational dimension in the case of existing childcare provision" (DES, 2005, p. 33). Measures to embed quality early learning experiences for children within childcare provision are advocated in *DEIS.* This also involves "delivering education-related professional support and training to existing providers, together with a curriculum and quality framework for early childhood education with the assistance of the NCCA and the CECDE" (DES, 2005, p. 33). According to DES (2005, p.34) the " Department will aim to add value to early childhood provision in communities served by the urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage by supporting the implementation of a quality early education dimension". It is advised the guidelines for the Early Start programme "identify good practice in this regard".

In order to meet the first goal of the *National action plan for social inclusion 2007-2016* (Ireland, 2007a, p. 35) a time frame has been established. In relation to the early childhood education measure "the *DEIS Action Plan* will be extended to the urban primary school communities with the most immediate and pressing needs by 2010. This measure will continue to be extended to encompass the remaining schools in the urban primary strand of DEIS after 2010". To date settings have received Dormant Account

funding "for quality improvement measures linked to Síolta" (http://www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=1233&ad=1&mn=earh&nID=4) and a research project "aimed at coordinating, enhancing and evaluating educational provision for children aged three and four years of age in one cluster of DEIS early childhood education settings" has commenced (http://www.cecde.ie/english/TargetedECE0Provision.php).

Early Start

The Early Start Pre-School Project was (OECD, 2004, p. 32) launched by the DES in 1994 as a one year targeted intervention for three year old children considered most at risk of not reaching their potential within the education system for reasons of socio-economic disadvantage. Two classes of fifteen children attend pre-school each morning from 9.00 to 11.30am and a similar number of children attend in the afternoon from 12.00 to 2.30pm. Coolahan (1994, p. 108) referred to the debates on the "intensity" that an effective early years intervention could have. It was imperative that "adequate resources and training for teachers/leaders" should be provided in addition to suitably "enriched and effective curricula and pedagogies".

The *Early Start* pilot project is the most significant publicly funded preschool intervention scheme that currently exists in Ireland (NCC, 2009). Whilst acknowledging that the benefits of this kind of provision are longitudinal, to date evaluations of Early Start have proved disappointing (Educational Research Centre, 1998; Kelly and Kellaghan (1999); Lewis and Archer, 2003). It has remained a pilot programme.

Prevention and Early Intervention Programme

The ten year social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (Ireland, 2006) committed the Irish Government to improving the lives of our children. The need for innovative and rigorously evaluated measures to respond to emerging needs of children and to provide an opportunity for learning about new, more integrated ways of designing and delivering settings was recognised. The Irish Government is co-funding a €36m project with Atlantic Philanthropies (from 2007-2012). Entitled the *Prevention and Early Intervention Programme* it aims to avert children succumbing to the risk associated with disadvantage as well as providing children with the resilience to overcome those risks. The initiative is being implemented in three locations – Tallaght (the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative), Ballymun (Young Ballymun) and Northside Partnership (Preparing for Life).

Appendix 3 Pilot Study Report

A pilot study was undertaken on the 12th February 2009. This report sets out the aims of the pilot study, how support was elicited for the pilot study and how the ethics of undertaking a pilot study were considered. A brief outline of the setting and the volunteer educator, and undertaking the collection of data is also provided.

Aims of the Pilot Study

It was intended to pilot study the entire process of the study. This was to establish:

- a protocol for getting data in the three settings;
- consulting the educator on their plan for the day and taking advice on when to film;
- getting children's assent;
- filming, audio-taping and taking field notes in three group activities (see definition below);
- getting the educator's opinions on how they felt the session went, in particular their interactions at the end of each filming session;
- piloting the interview and
- practice in working on the data analysis.

The pilot study provided me with the opportunity to learn 'on the job' as suggested by Robson (2003); and to refine my plan regarding the data collection and protocols to be followed.

Eliciting Support for the Pilot Study and Ethical Considerations

The pilot study early childhood setting was selected as it shares similar characteristics to the target settings for my study. It was in an urban area designated as disadvantaged. It catered for three and four year old children. It was publicly funded. There was a commitment to ongoing professional development of the staff. There was a manager whose role did not include working directly with the children. I approached the setting because I knew many of the staff there through my work. I asked the manager of the setting would she ask her staff to volunteer to be observed. One educator agreed and informed the parents of her children that I was coming to film. She explained the nature

of the pilot study, and asked them if they had any objections. This particular setting engages in regular filming of their interactions, and all parents had signed a form consenting to interactions being filmed at the beginning of the year. On the morning of the pilot study I was introduced to all parents and all agreed that I could film and audiotape the interactions. The children were asked to give assent to my filming them (see Ethical Strategies for Research Involving Human Participants for Discussion). I gave a copy of the film and a transcription to the educator and will dispose of the film by deleting it from my computer and USB within three years of completion of the study.

Protocol and Observations

I arrived at the setting, at its opening time (8.45am), fifteen minutes before the children arrived. I stayed until 3.30pm when the children and most of the staff had left. This was to try and capture both the small group activities, the debriefing/clarification dialogues and what was intended to be the exit interview in the main study. In advance of the children coming in, the educator was asked to determine the occasions she would be working with small groups of children and if she would be happy to be filmed on those occasions. I ascertained when and where they would happen. Furthermore, the educator was asked when she would be likely to engage in spontaneous interactions with more than one child.

During the normal routine of the day a 'roll call' is held when all the children are in. At that time I introduced myself to the children as the 'watching and writing visitor'. The observations occurred in two different rooms: the 'free-play room' and a 'group room'. The camera was moved minimally (when leaving a room) and turned on and off by remote control. The audio recorder was continuously moved to be as close to the educator as possible. I also located myself close to the educator, but not close enough to

interfere with interactions or to intrude on children's activities. I also took field notes. Two previously planned small group activities were filmed along with one spontaneous group activity. In the pilot study group activities were defined as occasions when the educator schedules experiences with a small group of children in mind and/or engages with more than one child either spontaneously joining a group of children or responding to an invitation from children (for example in the pilot study one child asked the educator to read a story).

Interview

The interview was held at 2.00pm and lasted one hour. It was held in the staff room of the setting and was audio-taped. I began with an explanation of the process. This involved checking how the educator felt the day had gone, whether this could be considered typical of her normal day, and whether her interactions were also typical. Finally the interview schedule was used as the source of questions in addition to a number of questions which arose during the process of the observation. For example, one question to the practitioner was "I noticed a lot of your interactions were to do with naming, describing, modelling; I'm just wondering what would you say about that observation, would you agree or..."? The answers revealed a wealth of information on the practitioner's plans of working with specific children who have speech and language difficulties. I found myself slipping into the role of practice tutor. This role is not appropriate to the role of researcher and is to be avoided in the main study. However, adopting a strategy such as this (reflexivity) means that the analysis of the observations will inform the exit interview. My data analysis then becomes part of a continuous activity, which cannot be left to the end of the data gathering experience (Edwards, 2001).

Appendix 4 Field Report

This report describes the process of gathering the data in the field incorporating modifications to the original plan, the detail of the observational data collected, the debriefing sessions and the exit interviews. The protocol undertaken in each setting, the research diary and the challenges that emerged before and during the collection of data are then outlined.

Field Report

Modifications to my Original Plan

In early March, 2009, I secured three research sites reflecting the three different types of setting as planned (an early start, a community childcare setting and a voluntary early intervention setting). All the information on the study outline and the requirement for permission from parents for filming had been sent to the settings in the preceding weeks (see Appendix 11 Plain Language Statement, Appendix 12 Informed Consent Form for Practitioners and Appendix 13 Informed Consent Form for Parents). One volunteer educator was selected for observation in each setting.

The first modification to my plan was the withdrawal of the Early Start setting at the last moment. I located a third setting which met the general criteria for the study: it was statutory, in an area designated as disadvantaged, and catered for children of three and four years of age. It was not an Early Start setting. I named the settings Cherry, Rowan and Birch.

Once I arrived at the settings some minor modifications to the scheduling of the data collection were required. Days and times were changed to accommodate staff meetings in one setting, educator training in another and the routine in a third. In order to achieve as much dependability as possible in the data collection, from the first week (of six

weeks in each setting) Tuesdays were dedicated to Cherry, Wednesdays to Rowan and Thursdays to Birch. Each day I arrived before the children as I felt this was less disruptive to the setting and it afforded me an opportunity to consult with the educators in advance on their plans for the day, without interfering with their practice. The specific time spent in each setting is detailed in the next section.

Detail of Observational Recordings Collected

As discussed in Chapter 4. Data Collection Instruments the observational data was collected by digital audio recording and digital filming of interactions in group experiences in each setting on each day. I recorded notes on the observations in a 'Field Notes Form' (see Appendix 7 Field Notes Form) and I took a running commentary on other aspects of the day in a 'Site Visit' book.

The routines varied in each of the settings. In Cherry the children attended for almost full day care (from 9:30 – 16:00), whereas the others were more sessional (8:30 – 13:15 and 9:30 to 13:00). As a result I captured different experiences in different settings. Table 10 depicts the data captured through recording (see Appendix 14 Observation Logs for greater detail).

Table 5
Detail of the Total Group Experiences Recorded

Setting 1 Cherry			**Setting 2 Rowan**			**Setting 3 Birch**		
Date	**Description**	**Time**	**Date**	**Description**	**Time**	**Date**	**Description**	**Time**
21.04.09	Circle time Small group activity	27:02 43:18	22.04.09	Recall time Break time Small group time	06:42 14:13 26:02	23.04.09	Planning & Breakfast Small group time	21:51 39:20
28.04.09	Circle time Small group activity	29:48 40:63	29.05.09	Recall time Break time Small group time (SGT)	14:33 20:05 21:10	30.04.09	Planning & Breakfast Recall time & SGT	18:53 07:04 29:03
05.05.09	Circle time Small group activity	28:35 30:24	06.05.09	Recall time Break time Small group time	11:51 13:41 28:45	08.05.09	Planning & Breakfast Recall & SGT	22:56 29:42
12.05.09	Circle time Small group activity	30:01 22: 00	13.05.09	Recall time Break time Small group time	04:58 21:43 16:38	14.05.09	Planning & Breakfast Recall & SGT	39:52 26:43

Protocol Adopted in Each Setting

I adopted the same approach in all of my visits. I joined each team in the morning at the time they met before children arrived in the settings. In two settings (Cherry and Rowan) this meant joining them for a cup of tea at 9:00am and in the final setting (Birch) starting at 8:30.

Access/establishing familiarity/profile

On the first day I arranged time to speak with each of the research educators. The purpose of that meeting was to go through the process again, ensure they were happy to sign the consent forms and continue the study and check on the status of the parental permissions. In those first two days I attempted to complete the profile of the settings, drew maps of the environment, and captured the routine (posted and actual). I wrote notes on general impressions and things that occurred to me in the Site Visit book. I established familiarity with the setting and the children. I planned to be as inconspicuous as possible, while gathering the observational data. I asked educators to remind the children I was coming in advance and introduced myself briefly to the children as a "watching and a writing visitor". In an attempt to retain the naturalness of the setting, I observed Denscombe's advice and tried to position myself unobtrusively, avoid interaction and spend time on the site (Denscombe, 2003). I immediately demonstrated being an observer in each setting by taking out my Site Visit note book, sitting down, looking at the educator and writing notes.

On the second day I set up the camera and the audio recorder for practice in where to place the equipment. I spoke to each educator, reminding them that I would be filming from that day forward. Also, that at the beginning of each day I would ask: what their plans for the day were, and where and when would optimum recording

opportunities occur. Finally I reminded them that I would conduct debriefing dialogues at the end of each day.

Recording/debriefing sessions

On the four days where I recorded the interactions I undertook observations from the moment children came into the room until I left. I wrote a running commentary on the general routine of the day, the kind of experiences engaged in, general impressions and things that occurred to me in the Site Visit book.

The locations varied in the actual observational data gathering sessions but the process remained the same. I would set the camera up early in the morning (before the children were in, or before they came into the room) pointed at the area where the group would form. I also planned where to put the audio recorder at a removed location to the camera. I started recording as the children were settling around the table for the activity and I stopped recording when the educator had left the table or the activity had come to an end. As explained in Chapter 4.7.1 Observer effects I consulted with the educators on how being observed affected them that day, how may it have changed their usual behaviours, how they felt the day went and was there anything unusual about that day.

Exit interviews

The exit interviews were held immediately after the observations on the final day of data gathering in two cases (Rowan and Birch) and in the third case (Cherry) I returned at 14:30. In each case the educator and I went to a quiet room. I asked permission from the educators to audio record the interview. The interview started once the tape was switched on. In addition to the questions[13], I captured elements of the profile of the

[13] See Appendix 9 Interview Schedule.

setting that I had not gathered in the first few weeks. I thanked the participants and gave them copies of the films to date with a commitment to send them the final's day's film with the interview transcripts and observation logs.

From the beginning of the field research process as soon as possible after getting the data each day I downloaded the film and audiotape to my computer, recharged the equipment batteries and wrote in a research diary.

Research diary

In the diary I recorded an impression of the day, questions that struck me about the observations, the educator, a child or general queries. I recorded thoughts on general organisation of the setting, adult interruptions and other issues that arose. I went through my Field Notes and the Site Visit notes and I transcribed pertinent details of those into my research diary. I wrote about assumptions and biases. I wrote about things to follow up with the educators in the interview. I wrote about reflections on elements that were not included in the interactions coding schedule that I had developed (see Appendix 6 Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule). I wrote about issues that emerged such as the noise levels, actually organising for interactions; the idea of pedagogical framing (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002), also known as curriculum management (Wells, 1985a) and environmental scaffolding (Mercer, 1994). I wrote reminders to myself on things to think about in the next set of observations. In its entirety after collecting the data the diary consists of 16,545 words. A full record of my activities as I conducted the study was kept ensuring a clear audit trail. This included my field notes, raw data in the form of film and audio recordings, daily research reflections, observation logs, transcripts of interviews, transcripts of selected group experiences, and the Excel Workbook containing the selected transcriptions with detailed coding and analysis of the

interactions. To maintain a clear audit trail of the development of the themes, I revised the coding schedule which I had developed (see Appendix 6) regularly, recording modifications as I went.

Initial findings

I was welcomed consistently in all the three settings and overwhelmed with people's generosity to have me there and was consequently profoundly grateful. In the main my impressions of the settings were very positive. The settings were well equipped, thought has gone into the room arrangements and there appeared to be a culture in all settings where the educator's work with children is taken seriously and a commitment to ongoing training evident. In my diary I noted "Adults were getting into role with the children being the 'hairdresser'". I noted educator's "gentleness, respectfulness, and modelling of good manners"; educators being "focussed on the children".

Being able to build spontaneously on children's interests and managing to stay in tune with them while managing to support others. For example during the initial profiling days, at free-play, Rachel was playing with three children who were "asleep" in a giant box. Three boys were looking for a batman cape and asked her where it was. She suggested where to look and when they couldn't find it she said it must be in the wash. "How about making one from paper"? She suggested. She got some crinkly red and silver paper. She asked one of the other boys could she use his cape as a template. She asked the boys to help her hold the cape down on the paper and started marking it (modelling). She asked them to cut it out and then cello taped the cape onto one child's back. Another child wanted one so the silver paper was used and the same process began. The third child marked out his own 'cape'. The cape making built on the children's ideas and was co-constructed. The children seem very content with their

capes. In the meantime Rachel protected the children who were "asleep" in the big cardboard box. There was an air of industrious and focused play.

In fact I wrote in my diary on 31.03.2009, "Having been to all three settings at least once at this stage, I'm really worried about my ability to be objective. I could certainly see in different settings where the environment could be improved, but in all three cases, I like the interactions and find myself *not* thinking "why doesn't she...." I wondered if having a setting back out, influenced me to see everything with rosy lenses. Initially, I felt that could be a real challenge for me. Other challenges also emerged.

Challenges and dilemmas

I have already outlined the major challenge of the setting dropping out. Other challenges surfaced such as maintaining my watching and writing visitor status, the noise levels in the settings, the varying routines and consequent challenges on decisions on what to film; the impact of my presence and the nature of gathering data using technology.

I managed to maintain the 'watching and writing' visitor role. As expected the children were interested in a new comer to their setting, it was difficult to remain neutral. One boy approached, without speaking, but put his arm around me, a girl asked me to" read a story", a third boy asked me to "play with the play-dough". In all situations I smiled at the children, explained "I'm sorry but I'm not a playing visitor, I'm *only* a watching and writing visitor". I then directed them to another adult for help and switched my attention to writing. I felt uncomfortable about this but was at great pains not to interfere with any interactions. In all instances the children lost interest in me very quickly. I was no fun!

I was continually concerned about the noise levels, in two of the settings generally and in a particular room in the third. I recorded "Acoustics in the room appear very poor. Music is playing; a lot of banging and indecipherable chatting. I'm worried"! I knew I was going to be very dependent on the film and audio records, because in some cases I couldn't hear myself what was being said. In the pilot study, this just didn't emerge as an issue. I reflected on this a lot. On the one hand I was concerned over literally not have decipherable data, and on the other a query arose as to whether this is an issue for interactions generally. For conversations to be pursued, children should at a minimum be able to hear them.

I was continually aware of the imposition that this study has on people. I checked every day with the educators whether my presence impacted on their interactions. They continually reassured me and I was satisfied. I began to believe the responses from the educators that my presence genuinely did not impact on their interactions, but... the last day's data gathering, in the last setting served to question that. On that day the focus educator asked the children to turn around to me to show me their faces and in the same setting that morning one of her colleagues requested the children to "sing loudly for Ger"! As against that in a different setting an educator in the interview said she had been thinking about my impact one evening, I was sure she was going to say that I *did* impact. This is what she said "Educator: ... "*I went home and I was going "Did she impact?" and I was thinking "Did she?" and I thought "no she didn't". But then there were one or two times when I was thinking back on interactions and I would have had with the children during the day that I thought "God, I must tell her the programme that's in place for that child". You know, there are probably things that you would pick up on....*" Her concern was about my interpretation of her interactions.

The use of technology also had its challenges. I was required to change my computer and camera a few days prior to the field research. I embarked on a fast and significant learning curve regarding the new technology. Unfortunately the new camera did not have a remote control facility. Between minding the technology, the concentration levels required, being mindful to not to interfere with the settings; and crucially to respect the setting, the educators, their colleagues and the children the process of data collection was demanding.

Appendix 5 Profile of Setting

Setting information

a. Anonymous code

b. Service type

Community	☐	Full daycare	☐
Voluntary	☐	Part-time	☐
Early Start	☐	Sessional	☐

c. Sources of funding

d. Number of adults employed — Please give number: ☐

e. Number in group — Boys: ☐ ☐ Girls ☐ ☐

f. The ratio of adults to children — Adults: Children:

g. Do you operate a key worker system

h. Are clear goals in place for the education of the children?

i. Type of curriculum

Early start	☐
Play-based	☐
Montessori	☐
High/Scope	☐
Steiner	☐
Mixture of curricula	☐
Other please specify _____	☐

j. Curriculum/programme planning and assessment

- No particular planning/assessment system
- Child observation records/High/Scope ☐
- Developmental checklists ☐
- Learning stories ☐
- Portfolios of children's work ☐
- Not sure ☐
- We have developed our own ☐

k. Approximate daily routine (for 3-4 year olds) Record ☐

Prompts

Break times (BT) _____

Small group activities (SGT) _____

Whole group activities (WGA) _____

Freeplay/plan-do-review (FP) _____

Outside time (OT) _____

Greetings/departures (GD) _____

Care/toileting (CT) _____

Other _____

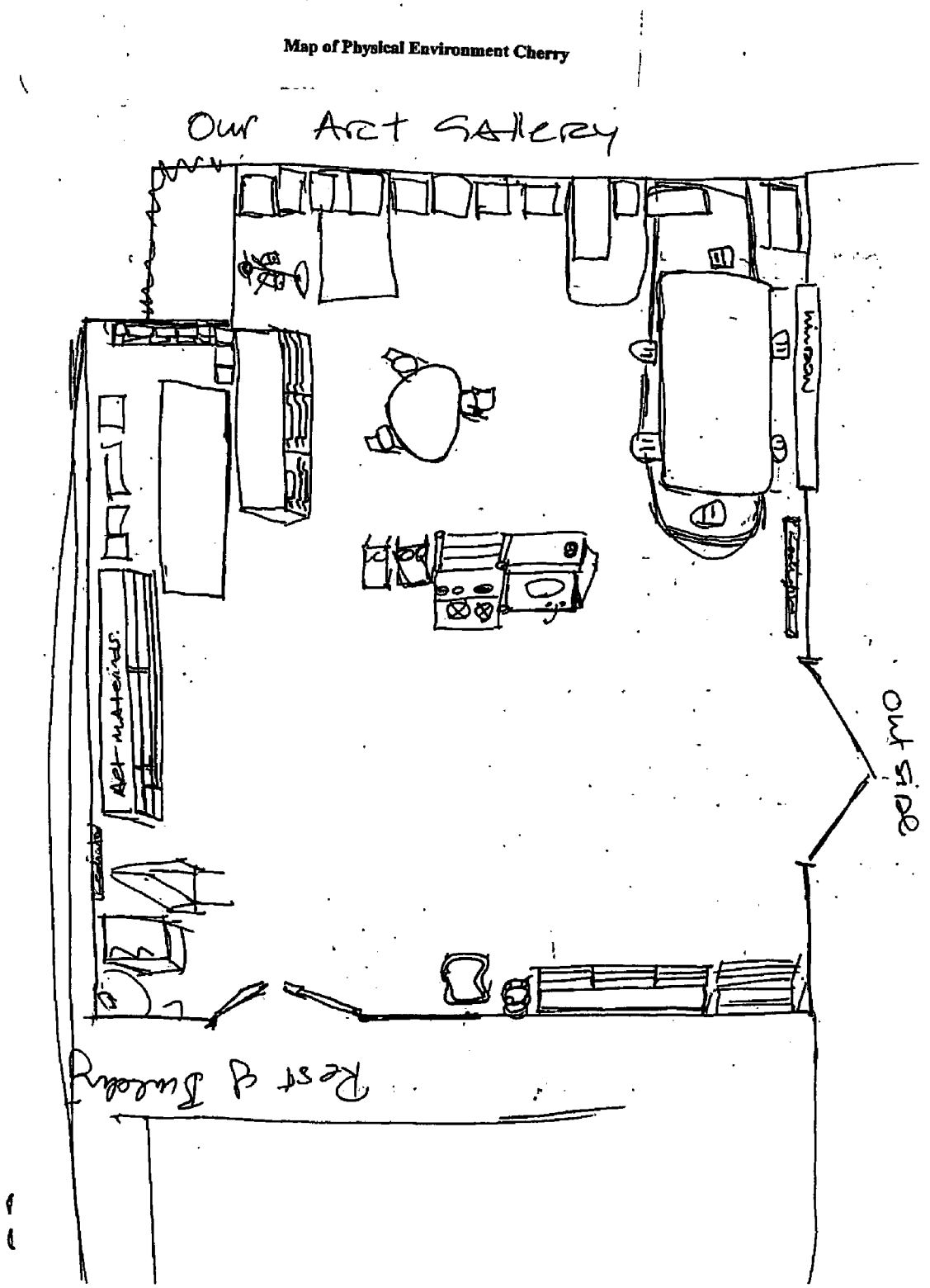
l. Links to speech and language therapists _____

Links to psychologist _____

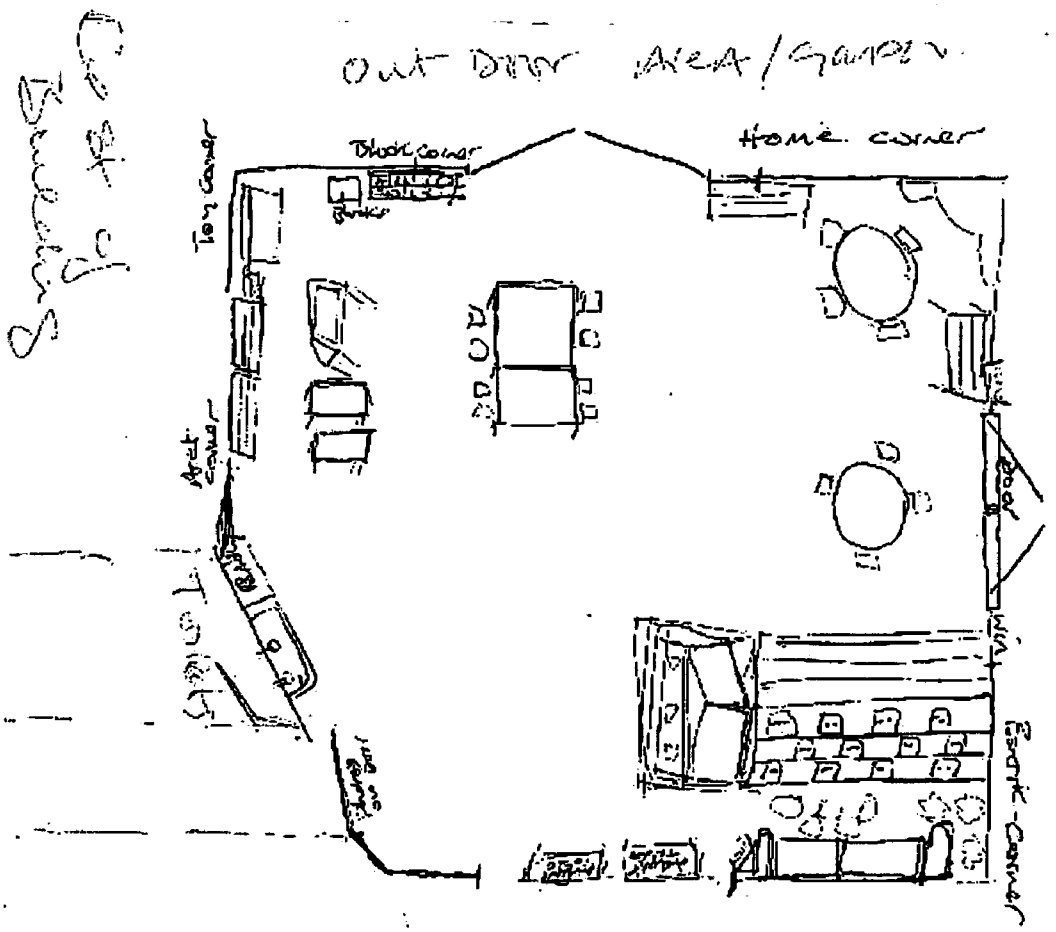
_____

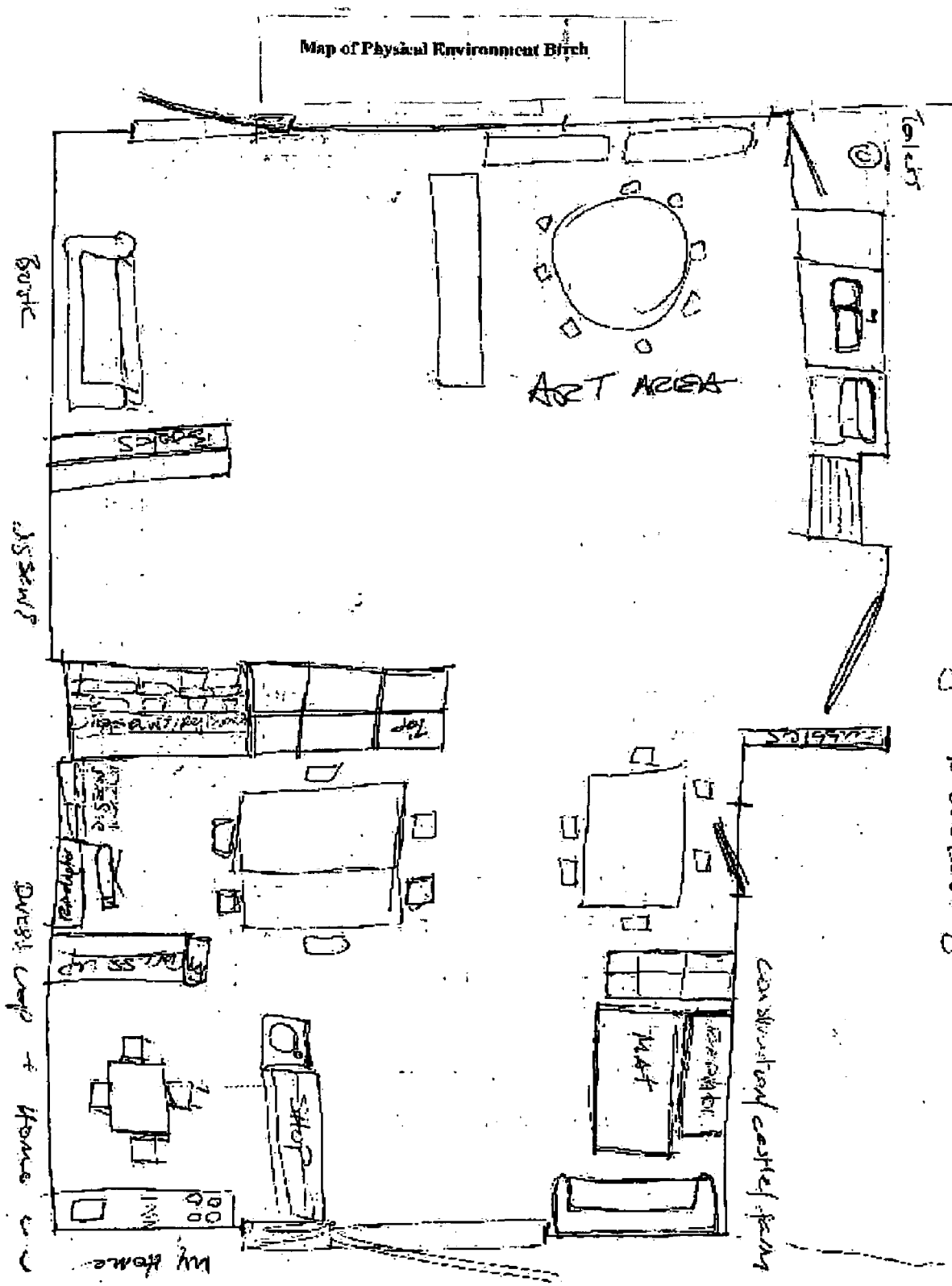
m. Other

Map (sketch) of physical environment



Map of Physical Environment Rowan




Map of Physical Environment Birch
ART AREA
SHOES
SHOES
SHOES

Appendix 6 Early Childhood Interaction Coding Schedule[14]

Educator demonstrates concern for children's well-being: physically caring for a child, attendance to bumps, giving reassuring affection, cuddles.

Educator initiates social conversation: talking about topics which are not related to the child/ren's activity/learning objective, uncritical sharing of experiences.

Educator affirms a child: encouraging or affirming child action, effort or behaviour; nodding head; saying 'Mm hm?'; 'Go on'; or 'I see', repeating utterance, providing feedback e.g. "you've painted a red line on side of page".

Educator redirects/criticises a child: using statements intended to change behaviour from non-acceptable to acceptable pattern; e.g. "sit still"; "stop".

Educator directs a child: allocating tasks, informing, describing, explaining, and initiating an activity.

Educator extends and/or scaffolds children's learning: making a suggestion to allow child to see other possibilities/connections in the activity in which s/he is taking part; stretching his/her abilities/giving more responsibility through a series of small steps; drawing on children's experiences.

Educator models for children: demonstrating activities, thinking skills, negotiation skills, collaborative working; personal behaviours; language and communication skills; accompanied by the child's attention and interest.

Educator in discussion with children: encouraging talk and thinking, actively listening, exploring and interchanging information or ideas on a topic/task at hand; both sharing conversational control; open-ended questioning; talking about what a child would like to do and learn and has done and learnt; supporting reflection, problem setting and solving; enabling joint involvement.

Educator responds to child initiation: joining in child's activity; taking part in shared activity; taking direction from child ("you be the cat"); staying within child's play scenario; trying out or imitating their suggestions/actions; collaborating.

No interaction or confusion: periods of silence (when Educator is not observing child prior to engagement) or when observer cannot hear or understand the dialogue.

Other: categories which emerge from the data and are not included above.

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[14] Categories adapted from Flander's (1970) *Interaction Analysis System*; Siraj-Blatchford et al., (2002, pp. 144-145) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*, Fisher, (2007, p.618) *Dialogic Teaching*. Moyles, et al., 2002aaa, pp. 169-170) *Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness* and Chapter 3.

Appendix 7 Field Notes Form

Record Number:_____Date: _____Participant code:_____ Setting:_____

Time	***Ratio***	***Description of activity***	***Location***	***Initiator***	***What is being said***	***S/ P***

Appendix 8 Debriefing Dialogues

At the end of every session educators are asked:

Is there anything to like to explain or clarify about today?

Are the events observed today typical activities and interactions which occur in the normal daily routine?

Did my presence affect your interactions? If so, how may it have changed your usual behaviours?

Appendix 9 Interview Schedule

Many thanks for agreeing to this interview. Your answers will be invaluable in helping me understand practice in ECEC settings, in particular in relation to interactions. Your responses are completely confidential.

Section A: Background information ***Anonymous code***

Personal information ☐

1.a. What do you like to be called? Practitioner ☐ Early Years Teacher ☐ Preschool Teacher ☐

1.b. Date of birth (if possible?) ☐☐☐☐☐☐

1.c. How many years have you been working with children in the early childhood sector generally? ☐

1.d. How long have you been working in this setting? ☐ How long is this setting established? ☐

1.e. Please specify your country of origin _____

1.f. How many 3 to 4 year olds (current age) do you work directly with? ☐

I. g Of those children, are they here for one year or two? Who are they?

One year_____ two years_____

I.h What are the criteria in which children get a place here?

Information on beliefs, education, qualifications and ongoing training

2.a What are your own beliefs about the function of your setting and your role within this setting?

2.b. What is your highest level of formal education? The following are prompts:

No formal qualifications..... ☐

Primary school..... ☐

Group/Intermediate/Junior Certificate..... ☐

Leaving certificate (or its equivelant)..... ☐

PLC (Post Leaving Certificate course)..... ☐

Third level certificate/diploma or equivelant professional qualification ..... ☐

Third level degree..... ☐

Post graduate degree..... ☐

Other _____

Completed qualifications/awards

2.c I am interested to know about any completed qualifications/awards you may have or are currently undertaking. The following are prompts.

NQF	Award	Title	Completed	Ongoing
Level 4	FETAC Level 1	Early Childhood Education and Care		
Level 5	FETAC Level 2	Certificate in Childcare		
Level 5	FETAC Level 2	Care of the Special Child		
Level 5	FETAC Level 2	Special Needs Assistant		
Level 5	FETAC Level 2	Module – Integrating Children		
Level 5	NVQ Level 2	Early Years Care and Education		
Level 5	NVQ Level 2	Playwork		
Level 6	NVQ Level 3	Supervision in Childcare		
Level 6	NVQ Level 3	Early Years Care and Education		
Level 6	NVQ Level 3	Playwork		
Level 6	NVQ Level 3	Caring for Children and Young People		
Level 6	NVQ Level 4	Early Years Care and Education		
Level 6	CACHE	Diploma in Nursery Nursing		
Level 6	CACHE Level 3	Diploma in Child Care and Education		
	NNEB	Diploma in Nursery Nursing		
Level 6	Certificate	Pre-School Care		
Level 6	Diploma	Pre-School Care and Education		
	Diploma	In Humanities in Montessori Education		
	Higher Diploma	In Arts in Montessori Education		
Level 7/8	BA	In Humanities in Montessori Education		
Level 7/8	BA	Early Childhood Studies		
Level 7/8	BA	Early Childhood Care and Education		
Level 7/8	BA	Early Childhood Education		
Level 9/10	Graduate Diploma	In Education (Primary Teaching)		
	Other			

Completed in-service and on-going professional development/supports

2.c Could you tell me about any in-service training, or any on-going professional development you are currently involved in or have completed to do with ECEC, or other supports? The following are prompts:

	Completed	In process
Implementing the High/Scope Approach		
Introduction to High/Scope		
First Aid		
Manual Handling		
HACCP		
Child Protection		
Other training/supports/ supervision		

Content of training

2.d I'm interested in the content of your training/workshops which focussed on ECC for children 3 to 4 years of age. Have you had any training (completed or ongoing) to do specifically with interactions skills enhance children social and cognitive learning and development? If so, can you tell me what was that training?

Section B: Programme formation/constituents in relation to 3 + 4 year old children

3.a. I would also like to know if you have opportunities to plan for and assess your interactions for the learning and development of the 3 + 4 year old children in your service.

If so, how often do you do that?

Not at all	Once a day	Once a week	Once a month
☐	☐	☐	☐

3.b What inspires your group activities?

3.c What resources do you draw on to help your planning ?

3.d Do parents contribute to your planning, if so how?

Organisation of day

4. a I am interested to know in what contexts, parts of the routine and location would interactions most likely happen? Can you tell me your thoughts on that?

Section C: Self assessment of educator - child interactions in daily practice

5. a I am interested to know, how important do you think interactions are in supporting children's learning and development? Can you explain further/ give me an example

5.b What is the extent to which you feel you should intervene in children's activities in order to engage them in dialogue?

5.c Can you tell me about the interaction strategies you use to enhance children's thinking, what are they?

5.e And what kinds of interactions do you think are the best suited to enhance children' social and cognitive skills and why?

5.d What do you think are the kinds of activities that best achieve children' social and cognitive skills?

6. This is a list of statements about how you might feel about your competence/confidence in relation to interactions to promote children's learning and development. Please read each one in turn and tick the box next to the response that best describes how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

I feel confident that I know:	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree Somewhat**	**Disagree Somewhat**	**Strongly Disagree**
6.a. how to meet children's physical needs; attend to children's upsets, and give reassuring cuddles				
6.b. how to have social chit-chat with children *Talking about general topics (not curricular)*				
6.c. how to encourage children *Affirming child action, effort or behaviours* *"You've painted a line on the page"*				
6.d. how to use conflict resolution/mediation strategies when enabling collaborative behaviour in children *Approaching calmly* *Acknowledging children's feelings* *Gathering information* *Restating the problem* *Asking for ideas for solutions and choosing one together (or other strategies)*				
6.e. how to directly teach children *Informing,* *Describing* *Directing* *Initiating an activity* *Organising and allocating tasks* *Reading, Singing songs*				
6.f. how to extend or scaffold children's learning *Assessing a child's current level of ability and provide sufficient support to bring them to the next level.*				
6.g. how to model for children, *Demonstrating activities,* *Demonstrating thinking skills* *Demonstrating negotiation skills* *Demonstrating collaborative working* *Demonstrating personal behaviours* *Demonstrating language and communication skills*				
6.h. how to engage in dialogue with children *Actively listening* *Exploring and interchanging information or ideas on a topic/task at hand* *Sharing conversational control with children* *Using open-ended questioning* *Discussing what a child would like to do and learn and has done and learnt* *Supporting reflection* *Enabling joint involvement*				
6.i. how to respond to child initiation *Joining in child's activity* *Taking part in shared activity* *Taking direction from child ("you be the cat")* *Staying within child's play scenario* *Trying out or imitating their ideas* *Collaborating with children*				

7. I am interested to know what opportunities and/or barriers may arise in your view to promote children's thinking and social learning and development through interactions.

7. a What in your opinion are the factors that enable the kinds of interactions outlined above?

7.b What in your opinion are the factors that impede the kinds of interactions outlined above?

8. Is there anything else about interactions whose aim is to support children's learning and development you'd like to add?

9. Framing for interactions checklist

(a) Creating a learning environment, routines, play
(b) Practitioner identity, respect, perspectives on children's learning
(c) Reflecting, Reviewing, Planning
(d) Ongoing staff development
(e) Curriculum content knowledge
(f) Clear aims on children's learning
(g) High expectations of children
(h) Technical competence,
(i) Theoretical sophistication

10. Have you any questions you'd like to ask me?

Prompting questions:

Can you explain further/ give me an example/ give me more details/ what did you think about the time ....?

Appendix 10 Film-Stimulated Reflective Dialogue: Cherry Sample Letter

Dear Rachel

Thank you for agreeing to take this last step with me in this research process. I want to understand more about the principles, theories/philosophies, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape your practice, particularly in relation to interactions between yourself and the children. There are two elements to our meeting, to engage in a film-stimulated reflective dialogue and to briefly present my findings to you and ask for your thoughts. Both of these processes are to explore your point of view regarding your interactions with children during conversations in small group learning experiences.

The 'film-stimulated reflective dialogue' is a two-way discussion between research partners. In this instance, that is you as research participant and me as researcher. I want to challenge both of us to understand how you approach your interactions with the children in the small group learning experiences and how you feel about them.

In engaging in this process with you, I want to use the film already taken, which you have a copy of. I am asking you to select an episode of no more than five minutes from each of the two final scheduled small group learning experiences filmed, which you feel reflects your approach to your interactions with the children during conversations. These are the Small Group Work, 'Occupations and hide and seek', filmed on the 5th May, 2009 and Small Group Work, 'Exploring fish' filmed on the 12th May, 2009. You have complete control over your own video-it is up to you to decide which clips best illustrate your practice.
I'll be challenging you with questions such as:

Practice
Why did you choose this excerpt /what do you feel is reflective of your interactions with the children in the episodes?
What do you see as your main role in this excerpt?

Principles
What are your priorities in the excerpt?
What are your thoughts about what is underpinning your interactions in this episode?
What kinds of things do you most value as part of your practice as seen here?

Theories/Philosophies
What is at the heart of your interactions here and the approach you took?

Other questions may arise in the course of our conversation such as:

- What were you thinking here?
- Why do you think you made that decision?
- How do you know that?
- And what else...
- On reflection now, it there anything else that struck you about the films?

After that process is complete, I may return to the transcription of the previous exit interview for further explanation and or clarification.
Sincere thanks

Appendix 11 Plain Language Statement - Study on Interactions

Dear Practitioner

My name is Geraldine French and I need your help. In Ireland, we have little or no information on interactions in early childhood care and education (ECEC) settings. I would therefore like to research interactions in three selected early childhood settings. This study is conducted in partial fulfilment of a Doctorate in Education (EdD) awarded by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.

I would like to observe one volunteer practitioner and the children, in each of the settings for two and a half hours, one day a week, for four weeks. Within each two and a half hour period, I would like to audio-tape, film and take field notes of two group activities that naturally take place in the setting. The practitioner can decide in advance what two activities I may film. I am also interested to ask practitioners after each session, how they felt the group activities went. In addition, I would like to conduct one tape-recorded interview with the practitioner, on general issues relating to interactions.

Whereas I do not see any potential risks as such, I must acknowledge that as a practitioner it is very uncomfortable being observed and very difficult therefore to behave naturally. I will try to be as discreet as possible and be sensitive to the impact of my presence in the room. I will spend time in the preceding two weeks in the setting in advance of the observations to profile the setting and allow children and staff adjust to my presence. I must also alert practitioners, that as a researcher, I have an obligation to report child abuse or any serious infringements of the Preschool Regulations (DHC, 2006).

Transcriptions from the observations/interviews may be part of the finished thesis, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included. The video will be viewed by me and perhaps the supervisory team in St Patrick's College, but is *only* used to ensure that I have every opportunity to capture the data accurately. I will be analysing all of this material and later may share this analysis with colleagues in the early childhood community for educational purposes. I intend to maintain confidentiality and anonymity (within legal limitations). I will discuss with the settings how the reporting of the study will maintain that confidentiality in any future publications (of which the practitioners will be alerted). All data, both raw (film and audio records and transcribed material) and processed data (excel sheets and computer programmes with the qualitative data) will be securely stored by me for the duration of the study. I will dispose of the data by deleting it from my computer and USB within three years of completion of the study.

I am hopeful that practitioners will find this process interesting and useful. It should provide them with an opportunity to see themselves in action and reflect on their interactions. The participants will get written results of my analysis when a final draft has been accepted by my supervisors. It is anticipated that the study will be at final draft stage late 2009. Each participant will receive, more immediately, a copy of their unique filmed interactions and a copy of the transcript of the interview for verification. I also plan to give the volunteer practitioners a copy of recent publications, which are relevant to ECEC. Involvement in this research study is voluntary. I will need to ask for parental consent and children's assent. Participants may withdraw from the study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the study are completed.

I am asking for one volunteer practitioner to allow me observe their interactions with children of three to four years of age in group activities. You are in a unique position to help me fill the information gap on interactions. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have, contact details below. Ideally I would like to start the profiling the setting in the week beginning March 23rd 2009.

Geraldine French, email: gfrench@iol.ie, phone: (01) 4963588, mobile: 087 2360845

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Administrator, Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Phone: (01) 884 2149.

Appendix 12 Informed Consent Form for Practitioners

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE DRUMCONDRA

Study on Interactions - Informed Consent Form for Practitioners

I. Research study

My name is . I have been asked to volunteer for this research project on interactions between practitioners and children of three to four years of age, in group activities, in three selected early childhood settings in an urban area designated as disadvantaged. I am aware that the research is conducted by Geraldine French, as partial fulfilment of a Doctorate in Education (EdD).

II. Purpose of Research

I am aware that the purpose of this small scale study is to shed light on the interactions occurring between practitioners working in ECEC settings with three and four year old children in group activities, and that it aims to give a picture of practice across a range of settings in relation to these interactions.

III. Requirements of Participation in Research Study

I am aware that the study involves the researcher observing me (one volunteer practitioner) interacting with children for two and a half hours, one day a week for four weeks. Within that two and a half hour period, two group activities will be recorded each day. I can decide in advance what two activities will be recorded. I will be asked after each session, how I felt the group activities went. The researcher also plans to conduct one tape-recorded interview with me on general issues relating to interactions and possibly to pick up on issues relating to the filmed observations. This should take approximately one hour. The interview will be transcribed and I will get the chance to read the transcript and made any amendments. Furthermore I will get a copy of the films and the findings when complete. I agree to being filmed and audio recorded.

IV. Arrangements to Protect Confidentiality of Data

I am aware that transcripts from the observations/interviews may be part of the finished thesis, but under no circumstances will my name or any identifying characteristics be included. I am aware that the researcher will be analysing all of this material and later may share this with colleagues in the early childhood community for educational purposes. The data will be stored in the researcher's office, at her home. Both raw (transcripts and video/audio records) and processed data (excel sheets and computer programmes with the qualitative data) will be securely stored for the duration of the study in her desktop computer, and separate from the computer (on a USB key), both of which will be securely locked in the researcher's absence as will any documents. Any data retained (with my approval) at the end of the project will be archived securely thereafter at St Patrick's College. Otherwise, the data will be disposed through deletion and shredding within three years of completion of the study. I note that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

V. Participant – Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question).

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?	*Yes/No*
Do you understand the information provided?	*Yes/No*
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	*Yes/No*
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	*Yes/No*

VI. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

VII. Signature: I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant's Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Witness: **Date:**

Appendix 13 Informed Consent Form for Parents

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE DRUMCONDRA

Study on Interactions - Informed Consent Form for Parents

This form is to seek permission from parents for their child's participation in an observation study. This study will be conducted by a researcher, Geraldine French, a doctoral student attending St Patrick's College Drumcondra. The researcher would like for you to be aware of the following:

- The study looks at interactions between practitioners working in early childhood settings with three and four year old children in group activities.
- It involves the researcher spending time in the setting for the children to get used to her and for her to see the daily routine, the environment and the best way to set herself up for the observations. This will be for two and a half hours, one day a week for two weeks
- The researcher then observes one volunteer practitioner interacting with the children for two and a half hours, one day a week for four weeks.
- Within that two and a half hour period, two group time activities will be filmed and audio-taped each day.
- The video will be viewed only by the researcher and possibly the supervisory team in St Patrick's College.
- Each practitioner will get the film of their unique interactions.
- Whereas written transcripts from the observations may be part of the finished study, under no circumstances will the children's or the practitioner's names or any identifying characteristics be included.
- All of this material will be analysed and later may be shared with colleagues in the early childhood community for educational purposes.
- The researcher will check with the children that they are happy to be recorded and will stop recording should they indicate they'd like her to stop.
- The researcher can be contacted for any further information and will make herself available to meet you before the observations begin.
- If parents have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Administrator, Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Phone: (01) 884 2149.

Permission slip

I give permission for my child to be observed as part of a doctoral study conducted by Geraldine French in the setting where my child attends.

SIGNED (Parent/Carer):

_____

Relationship to child:

Date:

SIGNED (Staff Member):

_____

Date:

Appendix 14 Observation Logs/Researcher's Comments/First Analysis

Observation log - Cherry; Day 1; Date: 21.04.2009; Part of routine:SG 'Understanding words with Bob'; Time: 13.40; Length: 33:17; Ratio 1:8

Recorder position in minutes		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences
Film	Audio		
		Settling in to group time; 'putting your ears on'	*Getting attention/listening device*
02:25	02:00	*Stretching exercises to 'wake up our muscles'*	*Sensitivity to children's alertness/tiredness; direction; encouragement; modelling (physical movement)*
04:07	03:49	*An 'opening a window sequence'*	*Explanation; scaffolding, responding to children's curiosity, discussion of length of arms; using an everyday situation as a learning moment*
05: 38	05:03	*Are we in the red room....? Turning our voices down*	*Direct teaching; scaffolding; non verbal direction through facial expression; using sign language; noise reduction strategies*
6:14 7:28	05:54 07:11	Understanding words: A card game focussing on 'where's the object'? Pictures in, and on, behind and beside Brief interruption with Manager	Direct teaching, in dialogue with children- exploring and exchanging information, laughing, repeating what one child said to the rest "did you hear..."?
8:56	08:36	Seamus 'how did you know they are golf clubs'? Going around each child to say in, on, under, over...etc	Direct teaching, commenting on children's responses "that's a good guess", acknowledging accomplishments "give me five",
9:55	09:36	Where's this girl lying? - Suzie Moore only! Continuing going around each child.....	Dealing with interruptions, active listening, repeating back what Suzie said, correcting grammar 'her' versus 'she', social conversation referring to children's home life,
14:40	14:01	Are we finished? A 'blue box' with mystery items "is it magic"? Such as key, ball, crayons, plastic knife and spoon, a bag,	Holding objects up for identification, non-verbal facial expressions for amusement, getting attention, enabling collaborative behaviour

16:40	16:00	"Let's see have I brought my little friend with me... 'Bob' the production of a pair of eyes placed over the finger and used as puppet; Bob directs children to e.g. "to put the ball and the key in the bag, etc... and later the bag in the box d, ears, moth, shoulders, lap, belly, neck"	Direction, novelty, use of facial expression; dramatic effect, extending-increasing challenge in the task ;
26:18	25:08	Bob asked children to "put the bobbin in the bag and the bag in the box". Bob was passed around by the children to help ask each other questions	Humour, direction, asking children – "who has a question for Bob"? ; novelty Child initiation
31:43	29:01	"Is he grumpy"?	Naming emotions: anger frustration, commenting on manners "lovely manners", noise reduction techniques "turning voices down"
32:03	31:37 33:25	"I think we need Andie Angry" Getting 'Andie Angry' Lots of children with sad faces Pass the smile'. Squeezing Andie Angry	Child initiation
36:38	37:41 38:28	Talking to Andie Angry/Having a shot Faces/arms for cuddles When I count to five	Child initiation Direction
39:20	39:06	*Calling a train using 'finger spelling'*	*Spelling names verbally and in sign language*

Observation log - Cherry; Day 1; Date: 21.04.2009; Part of routine: Circle time; Time: 10.54; Length: 27:10; Ratio 1:8

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Ears on"; "wiggle your bums"	*Attention getting device*
		What we're doing in circle time	*Forewarning /foreshadowing*
		Good morning, good morning to you....	*Song*
		Lot's and lot's of children sung by Stephen with feet	*Responding to children's lack of enthusiasm, encouraging child initiation and following through*
		A roll call; blank page, using addresses (Does anyone know who lives in .....?)	*Asking questions, drawing on children's memories of relevant issues*
		Listen again; cluck, cluck; cluck	*Attention getting device*
		Where's the CD?	*Involving children*
		Gruffalo (song),	*Signing with expression and actions, tickling each child, laughing, joyfulness, playfulness*
		Pull a Funny Face	*Song*
		Exercises for our mouth to wake our mouths up	*Physically demonstrative/humorous*
		Controlling interruptions	*Reprimands/supporting dialogue/using 'hands up'*
		For this book have to use eyes and ears'; "Listen"	*Attention getting device*
		Sounds of the Wild, Story of 'The Ocean' (story reading,	*Direct teaching (story reading); listening techniques; active listening; reprimand; dealing with interruption and new children joining in*
		A child arrives into the group	*Social conversation, warmly welcoming*
		Letting children know 'what's open' for free-play	*Offering (limited) choice*

Observation log - Cherry; Day 2;Date: 28.04.2009; Part of routine: SG-"Making monsters'; Time: 11.17-11.58; Length: 41 minutes; Ratio 1: 8

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are those not featured in descriptive vignette of scheduled experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis Words in italics are those not featured in descriptive vignette of scheduled experiences
Film	Audio		
		Swapping chairs/wiggling bums	*Adult direction; getting attention;*
00:53	00:35	*Remember yesterday – sore legs/children talking about accidents/ making decisions/having to mind each other today, talking about feelings*	*Adult asking questions and requesting child responses; child initiation;, using sign language, enabling collaborative behaviour*
5:28	5:10	*Animal Stickers, identifying animals, inviting children to see, requesting children to listen to each other,*	*Enabling collaborative behaviour; asking questions; referring to home lives (one girl has a pet)*
8:53	8:35	*Roll call/spelling children's names using letters and sign language , asking "does anyone know"*	*Addressing each child;*
12:04	11:46	*Singing songs/Teaching Rachel song in Irish, asking each other for help, "Lámh, lámh eile, a haoin, a dó" , sung twice*	*Children leading; adult asking for clarification; responding to children's initiatives; asking for help from children; adult making mistakes; children correcting; practicing; planning for the morning, thanking children*
15:41		*Singing songs/Barney*	*Children leading; children signing; adult letting children sing'; active listening; affirming children's knowledge*
17:91		*Singing songs/Goldilocks*	*Children engaged, children using facial expressions; children and adult laughing; using signing to restore calm; using different languages; using arms to demonstrate size, huge/small; children loud; adult pointing out how children have their hands over their ears; small ears*
20:05		*Story time "There a Wardrobe in my Monster"*	*Adult direction (make yourself comfortable; reading story with animation; all children paying attention; allowing interruptions; asking questions; children laughing*
27:07		*"What kind of monster was he"?*	*Asking question; referring to home lives (one girl's dog)*
29:46		Small group time 'making monsters', "Would you like to know what we are doing this morning"? Check out the tables "Why do we put black paper on the tables"?	Foreshadowing (what's happening next); asking children to guess, teasing (threatening not to make monsters because adult forgot the aprons); responding to child suggestion "I'll get them"

30:02		Preparing the environment and getting ready Sally does not wanting to make monsters, invited to read books instead, helping with aprons, prepared tray delivery, settling at the table,	Initiating the activity; giving directions on setting up the room, directing children where to move chairs; modelling - moving chairs and tables, allocating tasks- getting materials, rolling up sleeves; closing door; giving limited choice "the books or the art"; responding to children's initiatives; modelling manners, 'thank you'; reprimands "turn your voice down a little bit"; explaining – why the bottle is sticky
37:07		"Let's see what we have"	Foreshadowing, asking children to identify the materials, using their senses in the case of coconut, open-ended questioning, repeating children's utterances, reprimanding "you've had your turn, put your bottle down, and hands down on your lap and wait until the girls are finished"
39:59 40: 30 41:31 42:19 43:34 45:15 48:35		Making monsters; exploration of the materials See how the table is really long? "If you need something what do you think would be a good idea to say"? More gathering of materials – "we need to get some glue" Getting other materials (wool, in press in room) "What do you think you'll make" , "It's your work, you can do what you like" Adult at door of room, calling to other worker for glue. Adult returns with glue- needs help opening it from other person Distributes glue on palettes to each child Adult settling down at table to work with children; "need to say to Seamus I'm not finished" "What's a container"? Sally shows picture to adult. Adult moving around to each child, acknowledging what children say "that's couscous" – "yes that's couscous"	Encouraging sharing communications, responding to children's answers, giving examples of other things to say "could you pass me the cotton wool please"? Are you finished can I take some of those please? Offering freedom of exploration, encouraging thinking "what do you think?) Responding to child's initiation "are we ready", "yes we are" Acknowledging children's patience Commenting on children's talk "lovely manners", Enabling collaborative behaviour, responding to children's questions Modelling, Encouraging children through affirming; in dialogue with children; commenting on what they are doing; asking questions "what are you going to do with those"?; collaborating - helping get more materials
57: 18 59:50 1:0:57 00:00 01:51 04:03 09:52		Sally comes over to the table to look at what the children are doing. She wanders around for a bit and then goes back and gets a book. She talks to adult, she wants to make monsters. Adult says it's too late and there are only 5 minutes to tidy up. Terry finished. Other children finishing up. Children asking adult to look at their work, Sally persisting Some children going to the book corners, others go to wash hands. Focus is tidying up. Adult says other toys are open when room is tidied.	Responding to questions; describing what the children are doing; reaffirming previous explicit statement on limited choice and that she chose not to play with the monsters; suggesting remembering to make better choices for the future; adult control, Adult responding, Adult re-stating previous expectation, Reprimanding –reiterating point , reprimanding (no choice) "No Sally the jigsaws aren't open , the books are open", "Don't' touch that Sally" direct teaching – giving directions to take off aprons, redirecting Sally to book corner, reaffirming, redirecting Stephen

Observation log - Cherry; Day 3; Date: 05.05.2009; Part of routine: SG- 'Occupations with Hide & Seek'; Time: 13.53 – 14.10, Length: 17: 00; Ratio 1:8

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are those not featured in descriptive vignette of scheduled experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis Words in italics are those not featured in descriptive vignette of scheduled experiences
Film	Audio		
00:03 00:08		*Children gathering around the table (one had found a recorder outside)* *Seamus (pretending to play wedding march on air recorder)* *Manager entertaining through whistling, asking children to play pretend whistles. Manager leaves*	*Interruption by manager, although manager building on children's idea*
00: 36		*Passing the recorder'; adult gets the recorder and each child passes it around and plays the musical instrument (it gets cleaned with a baby wipe each time!)*	*Adult building on children's idea, reprimanding – requesting child to wait, direct teaching (put your fingers..), enabling sharing, affirming, responding to children's talk, ensuring children hear positive things that children say about each other, using facial expressions, modelling, responding to children requests to play again, ensuring each child gets a turn, encouraging children to listen to each other, using facial expression to control behaviour, describing what children are doing*
08:01		'Ceiling too low, noise gets too loud' Announcing new game "Does anybody know who this is"? From her pocket adult withdrew 'occupation cards'	Foreshadowing (what's happening next), noise reduction strategies - explaining about the loud acoustics in room, asking questions (closed)
08:32 13:32	 11:56	'Identification cards (mostly male occupations firemen, priest, a fishing boy, builder, baker, mechanic, dentist, doctor, musician, astronauts, footballer, tennis player, priest, postman – few cards depicted females) Adult points out that boys and girls can do any job (priest?) Sally when asked to name an occupation said "I don't want that one; I want a girl one",	Asking children to identify who the people are in the cards, referring to children's families – encouraging guessing/thinking, e.g. does anyone know whose daddy is a painter? Engaging in dialogue /responding to child's utterances (Seamus sharing experiences of going to mass, blessing himself with family members), refocusing children's attention, restates children's suggestions, affirms children's guesses, acknowledging children's' preferences

13:57		Children offered choice of an occupation card	Offering choice, affirming choices made, directing, reprimanding, restating "men & women can do the same jobs"; addressing each child; attention getting strategies "sssh, ears on again"
15:26 21:20 22:00		'Hide and seek' Children hide one card on the wall, while another waits with adult. Adult retrieves matching card from her deck and gives it to child to hide. "How did he just know" "Who's next"? Betsy volunteers Passing back the cards through the children	Asking questions; giving directions; encouraging children to look all around; maintaining focus; creating diversions while children hide the cards; affirming actions; asking children to suggest songs as diversions while waiting; encouraging speculation (why Finbar found card quickly) , offering suggestions; accepting Betsy's refusal; refocusing attention, affirming hiding places; being playful ("he's not going to find it"!); winding activity down; modelling, repeating word utterances for pronunciation;
26:18- 30:23		*'Put your hands on your..."* *Taking deep breaths* *"Let's go"*	*Attention getting strategies – refocusing – setting up anticipation; direction, using humour, responding to children's utterances/suggestions; winding down; foreshadowing next activity, matching children's actions, enabling transitions*

Observation log - Cherry; Day 4; Date: 12.05.2009; Part of routine: SC- 'Exploring fish'; Time: 11.27 – 11.49; Length: 22: 00; Ratio: 1:6

Recorder Position		Description of activity	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Putting on aprons in yellow room	Social conversation, physical assistance, giving directions, acknowledging children's patience "great waiting";
	3:33	Talking about what's going to happen	Attention getting strategies; explanation of process; explanation of boundaries; responding to children's utterances; foreshadowing and forewarning; social conversation; noise reduction strategies
	6:13	Making transition from one room, through another , to the outside	Adult-adult talk; physical movement; greetings; giving direction
0:01	7:29 8:24	Settling around table – outside, adult changing fish water (point where film starts)	Adult preparing materials, children talking among themselves
0:37		Fish brought to table	Settling (at table strategies) strategies; storytelling (of getting the fish);
0:59		Exploring fish: checking for teeth and putting fish on table	Asking questions, initially adult holding item and demonstrating, talking about fish; responding to children's questions; encouraging exploration, acknowledging children's reluctance; enabling sharing;
2:33		Looking at fish's fins, spikes, eyes, Jack making fish fly	Naming body parts, encouraging exploration, correcting; physically moving around to all children, repeating children's statements; laughing; acknowledging children's reluctance; affirming children's responses
4:17		Fish scales	Laughing; acknowledging children's reluctance; affirming children's responses; encouraging physical exploration, responding to children's utterances;
6:26		Where's his brain?	Responding to children's questions; admitting lack of knowledge; encouraging exploration through smelling and feeling ;
7:09		Children putting fish in water	Confirming with children their requests; encouraging exploration;
7:37		Children taking them back out!	Confirming with children their requests; offering physical assistance in picking up fish; giving directions; laughing; reprimanding; confirming what children are saying;
9:21		Fish returned to the water + out again!	Adult to adult; responding to children's talk; cautioning; encouraging sharing;
10:07		"I'm cold", second adult arrives to take photos; children take aprons off and return inside.	Offering choice; foreshadowing; greeting; giving directions; noise reduction strategies

Observation log – Rowan; Day 1; Date: 22.04.2009; Part of routine: SG - 'Exploring sand and water'; Time: 11.13 – 11.37; Length: 24:00; Ratio 1:5

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
00:31	00:58	*Recall time: adult comes to the table with folders, one girl holds a calculator, whoever holds the calculator recalls. "Are you going to show me"? Diversion from elsewhere; adult records in each child's file what they did that morning.*	*Foreshadowing; encouraging listening, non verbal (pointing to ears); refocusing attention; confirming with child what she did; ensuring child is finished; offering choice (of recall or not); responding to child initiatives; going around each child; noise reduction strategies "ssh"; encouraging listening; reprimanding with explanation; apology for keeping a child waiting; noise reduction strategies "ssh"; ensuring one boy exhausted all they did that day; directing*
06:42		*Break-time preparation, adult leaves to get mats; child distrusting mats; adult leaves to get crackers; adult coming and going from the table to get food and drink.*	*This setting has made individualised place mats for each child and adult complete with name and symbol (great idea!). Children distribute the mats. Offering to one child that he do the mats; explaining (why it's his turn); distributing jobs; smiling; distributing plates to one child (to distribute); distributing crackers; distributing cheese (down to each child's level); distributing juice while encouraging children to hold the jug; distributing fruit (down to each child's level) and offering choice;*
12:46 13:28 14:44 15:24 16:14 16:41 17:49 18:26 19:34		*Adult sits down, then immediately gets up* *Adult sits down, records in children's files, children eating their break, adult continues recording, two children communicating with each other, adult writing in a file returns it to floor, adult leaves to get more juice* *Adult sits down, continues her writing. Brief interruption from visitor. Children curious* *Adult gets up and returns with more crackers and juice* *Adult sits down, continues her writing* *Adult finished writing in the file, gathers all the files (5) and sits with them on her lap and looking on at the children smiling.* *Adult gets up and returns with aprons and juice* *Check's if child needs to go to the toilet*	*Closed question ("Doesn't x make lovely snacks"?); repeating children's statements and affirming, "I know you like ... ").* *"Want more juice"?* *Responds to children when they talk, explaining* *Responds to child initiation* *Responds to child initiation* *Giving direction; asking questions ("did you not eat your cracker today?"; encouraging tidy up; foreshadowing*

19:55 20:27 21:17 21:44	20:22 20:54	Preparation 2 children clearing the table of dishes from their break, 1 child left at table, adult leaves to encourage 2 children to return. Adult helps putting on aprons, encourages others to tidy table, suggests to 1 girl to finish her cracker	Giving directions; checking children are O.K. ; offering choice "pick an apron"; Restating- small group time; Talking about yesterday's planning Offering choice "do you want to put on an apron for sand and water"; Accepting child's negative response, repeating children's talk "a girlie one". Physically supporting children with aprons- at their level; giving directions;
23:30	24:00	Adult get s PVC tablecloth and asked the children to help her	Giving directions; asking for help, focussing children's attention;
23:51	23:21	Adult left , returned with four containers with some sand in them, children settled into the table and looked excitedly at their boxes	Open-ended questioning "what happens when you mix it around"?
24:16		Adult left and returned with four beakers filled with water, and distributed the beakers to each child	Adult organising
24:52 25:29 26:00 26:25		She invited 5th child who didn't want to participate to join them. He did so, bringing paper, pen and scissors Adult retrieved some pasting sticks, which she passed around, she then got spoons and a fork; Adult leaves to get more water	Adult organising ; adult anticipates children's needs; letting children explore; responds to requests "more water"; demonstrates that one child has lots of water in his container, pointing out the hide tide mark
26:26 27:19 27:29 28:11	27:06	Enabling exploration - adult moving to be physically at level of child, putting her finger into the container and watching sand drip Adult returns to her seat and repeats putting her finger into 2nd boys container, offering more sand, Adult leaves to get more sand, Adult returns with sand and distributes it, Brief adult: adult conversation	Making statement/closed question "it's very messy isn't it"? Demonstrating, "look what happens when you put your finger in"; describing "is it like muck"; Organising more materials having asked "want more sand to see what happens"?

28:35		Checking in with boy with paper, pencil Pretending to eat sand and water mixture
30:01	30:31	Adult leaves
30:14		Returns with a cloth, protecting boy's draw
30:51		and cuttings
31:49	32:18	Adult moving to be physically at level of ch helping pouring; Checking children are ok, mopping up spills of water, throwing tissue attending to individual children's requests
37:06	37:36	Noise level in room rises as other groups fi
38:11	38: 37	their small group time; 5 children remainin
38: 50	39:18	table (4 spooning sand into container) Adult greeting toddler who arrives in from garden;
39:53	40:19	Checking are children finished; songs happ next
41:45	42:11	1 boy collected by his mother, brief adult: a
43:20	44:04	communication; reflected back to boy; boy paper leaves
44:12		Redistributing materials to 3 remaining Adult leaves table with empty container, re and mops spills Adult engaging with child from other group Warning for Large Group called; 1 child fir adult leaves to get more tissue, 2 children left; adult lea again Adult returns with some more sand and sug they tidy up. Adult cleaned table, Tidy up and children l when called for circled time

ng child's activity "you're cutting some more"
ling to child – staying within his scenario; affirming and
ng what children are doing; "Oh you're clever, pouring the water
"; assisting other child to do the same; organising, I'll leave them
ase "they get wet"
n "use your spoon"; monitoring –explaining floor getting wet
nting on children's work; "it looks like you have monster
making connections "like when you are on the beach" engaging
conversation about beach; observing; listening attentively;
- cutting out one boys picture; describing what's happening;
ging "i know you can do it"; focussing attention – raising up a
nd pointing out the line where sand has settled and water is on
cribing properties "wet"; straining to hear; directing, enabling
"when x is finished"; foreshadowing; physically matching one
vements-affirming; "you can do it" encouraging to show
what you are doing
g (you've got to tidy up") and explaining (adults "can't do all
heir own")
g in "are you finished"; directing – bring that over to sink"

ing finishing up by giving more materials. "We're going to to
so I'm going to give you some of this bit ok? And then we'll
tidy up".
direction "bring that over to the sink"

Observation log – Rowan; Day 2; Date: 29.04.2009; Part of routine: SG-"Washing the animals"; Time: 11.24 – 11.44; Length: 20:00; Ratio 1:5

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
03:14 05:17 05:43 06:31 08:24 09:16 14:36	00:	*Recall time, children gathering around the table, adult bringing children and settling them on chairs and putting chairs in at table* *4 children at table waiting for 5th boy to arrive* *Adult bring tissues to the table and children help clean it.* *Children run to bin and then wash their hands* *Children return and sitting on adult's chair, calling for her to see* *Adult returns and removes children* *Adult produces a folder and starts writings;* *Children recall using a stickle brick that one boy got adult records in each child's file what they did that morning; the file is on the table.* *Adult leaves to get mats*	*Discussion with one child having blue paint on his hands and then the blue paint that others have too; squatting down to child's level; responding to children's initiatives, staying within their theme Blue paint on girls' hand* *Noise reduction strategies: putting finger to lips and saying "I can't hear what x is saying when you are banging the table"; encouraging sharing "pass it on to X if you're finished"; ensuring each child gets a turn; accepting one boy's refusal to recall; encouraging others to speak; directing one boy to "turn around"; calling a name in humorous fashion (a boy who was slapping his neighbour); directing child to cover their mouth when coughing; sit on bums; on seats*
15:11 20:06 22:50 23:42 24:37 24: 58 25:50	 24:04	*Break time, distributing mats, plates; ensuring fair turns; going back and forward to and from the food trolley; distributing beakers; distributing crackers; distributing cheese; distributing fruit; distributing juice* *Adult sits at table and takes out folder;* *Getting more food* *Back at table and gets folder out and writes;* *Adult writing; distraction as one child in another group anticipates birthday cake arriving* *Adult get's another folder out and starts writing* *Adult telling children what they are going to do for small group time today* *Cake arrives* *Everyone sings happy birthday to child in room*	*Noise reduction strategies: 'ssh'; checking children's preferences "do you like"?* *"Would you like to try"? Squatting down to distribute food at child's level; offering choice; "would you like me to pour your juice"? "is everyone ok;* *"Is that orange nice and juicy" (closed question)* *Not hearing child's initiative "the juice dripped on me"* *Children banging items on their heads adult asks "what are you doing"? And Laughs* *Reprimand, "don't scream like that";* *Giving directions to boy in a different group,* *Getting attention strategies: "listen, listen"; foreshadowing. "You know sometimes we need to have a bath" non-verbal body language using her arms to demonstrate washing yourself. "Well the animals need one today"* *Adult directing children to sit in their seats, tidy table; encouraging*

28:34 30:01 30:30		*at another table* *3 children quickly bring plates up to sink* *Adult returns to the table with bowls of ice-cream, and leaves to assist other adults* *Adult returns* *Adult observing, brining her bowl of unwanted ice-cream to other place.*	*independence; directing "in your seat" in your seat for your ice cream"* *Discussion on your so lucky getting chocolate ice-cream, directing child in another group while sitting at home table with 5 children; directing children to bring back plates; "good boy";*
32: 20		*Lead in - adult asks boy to organise animals, since he's not eating ice-cream*	*Giving responsibility and direction;*
34:10		*3 children left eating their ice-cream, 2 others gone over to water table. At the table basin of animals has been added to the sudsy water. One boy is sitting the other standing. Adult helping put on the aprons*	
36:20 37:38 39:05 39:43 40:47		*One girl arrives to put on apron enthusiastically "Me, me, me", Adult helping put on the aprons;* *Adult calling others to join in* *Adult sits at water table (3 children)* *Each child has a jey cloth* *Calling last child to water table; distraction with child upset at neighbouring table, brief adult to adult communication* *Adult picks up basin from beside her to gather the cleaned animals, checking on task;* *Boy offers to get more; adult saying there's enough; given a baby by a visiting boy (different group), more animals arrive* *One boy, who hasn't joined in comes over to adult to talk, she asks does he want to play with the water with us? No, does he want to dry the animals (he doesn't want to wash them); he shakes his head. Boy hangs by the side of table; adult puts an arm around him and draws him in*	*Adult directing "Give them a lovely bath", "come on...; also responding to children from other group to turn light on;* *Adult uses attention getting strategies; refocusing on to the animals "Oh get in and clean between his toes and behind his ears"; using non-verbal language, pointing to behind the ears; organising; "Is his tail washed and his toes"?* *Describing "Ah, that's a baby, ah it's tiny* *Adult affirms new animal "Oh a gorilla".* *Adult modelling washing the animals; telling a story "he's been running out in the fields all day"* *Responding to children "he's over there, all right"? smiling and observing;* *Extending play opportunity, offering physical comfort;* *Demonstrating collaborative behaviour, "what do you need to tell..."? "There are lots of animals in there".*

		close to her; giving other options *Row breaks out with 2 boys, one grabs the other's arm.*	
41:59 42:57 45:11 48:54 52:01		Boy empties bowl of animals back into water, one girl comes over pulling at her apron. Second girl takes apron off; adult asks for a hanger Adult stays at water table Girl who has taken apron off comes over and shows adult her rhino, Boy, laughing, shows adult how his friend had put a hole in the tissue Adult says no running to boy and girl running around table; they move to sand table, adult removes the cover Adult turns her attention to the boys remaining at the water table; one returns the cleaned animals to the water Boy needs to go to the toilet adult checks does anyone else need to Adult leaves (3 children go with her); 2 boys remain seated washing Adult returns to sits at water table; keeping possession of basin. Brings basin full of washed animals to dry; get's cloths and suggests to children do they want to dry the animals; helping children to get their aprons off; hanging aprons on hanger; adult dries animals and puts them back on shelf; 2 boys disperse; boy and girls at sand table playing away together , no adult interaction	Responding to children's initiatives "Do you want to take your apron off"? She assists girl to do so. Directing "could you get me the hanger"? Acknowledging/affirming accomplishments "you're doing a great job" Adult smiling, looks at rhino and smiles, direct girl to get her shoes; Adult smiles, Adult providing opportunity. Ok, "you can play with the sand" "Oh get in and clean between his toes and behind his ears" Concern for other's well-being "Are you still washing them"?" What have you washed"? naming the animals and returning them to the basin; observing (sand table); smiling; affirming children's actions "you are getting loads of them cleaned"?; modelling "Can I wash one"?; modelling manners when boy put animal in basin "oh thanks"; asking which animal should she wash; smiling; asking for assistance "help me bring over the cloths"

Observation log – Rowan; Day 3; Date: 06.05.2009; Part of routine: SG- "Hammering play-dough"; Time: 11.18-11.46; Length: 18:00 minutes; Ratio 1:5

Recorder position		Description of activity	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio	Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	
00:	00:	*Recall time, children gathering around the table, adult bringing children and settling them around table on chairs and putting chairs* *Adult and children clean the table; adult and children wash hands; children return, and sit on adult's sea; adult then returns and assists children back to own seats* *Children recall using a tiara that one girl had; adult asks each child what they did that morning and records it each child's file; writing it on the table. Boy from another group brought over place mats*	*Direction; protecting children's physical boundaries "this is your space" and "this is your space";* *Attention getting strategies "we need to listen" using non verbal language (pulling her ears "put on your ears"; affirming children's actions "you are covering your mouth when you cough, good boy"; active listening (listening attentively and repeating back statement & recording); bringing artefacts of children's work; butterflies that one child made; explaining that it's his, highlighting children's name on page; refocusing "we are still doing recall time, we'll do our jobs after recall"; two children abdicating from recall was accepted; accepting mats from visiting boy "thank you"; ensuring everyone who wanted to recalled; ensuring fair distribution of turns (for jobs e.g. giving out the mats)*
11:52 18:29		*Break time, encouraging children to distribute mats, beakers; plates; ensuring fair turns; adult going back and forward to and from the food trolley; distributing crackers; distributing cheese; distributing fruit; distributing juice* *Manager enters the room* *Adult remains at the table with the children recording in the children's files; children talking to adult* *One boy asks for more crackers; adult checks with others about more crackers; some are brought.*	*Attention getting strategies "we need to listen to x" pointing to her ears (x distributing mats; affirming boys choices as he distributes mats "good boy"; squatting at children's level and participating as child gives her mat "who owns this? adult smiling puts hands in air and says " I do"; encouraging children to accept the cup they get; suggesting "then ask to swap"; accepting children's refusal of food; social conversation; eliciting help to pour juice with each child; modelling manners "you're welcome"; offering choice of fruit; accepting change of mind; responding to children's requests for more;* *Adult focused on writing not hearing/responding to 2 girls; reprimanding "close your mouth"*

24:00 24:18	 23:12	*Adult leaves and girl sits on her chair; adult returns and squishes onto chair and moves girl over to hers; adult leaves again and a boy and a girl sit on her chair.* *Adult returns with juice and tells children to move. One girl does, to be replaced by another, adult tries a number of strategies and finally one works* *In the meantime the Manager comes over to say hello to children and gives and receives a few warms hugs*	*Humour "You're a messer", laughter;* *Direction "you need to move around; scootch around" (one girl does) naming boundaries "look, this is your space" smiling; distraction- "you want to take your name (mat) for me"? (she refuses " I don't want my name") "you can put it in the drawer for me (still refuses)"; explaining and drawing on children's empathy humorously "you're on my chair; , I've no chair now, I've got to stand (pretend crying)*
24:30		*The girl vacates the seat and then tries to put pressure on her friend to move to return adult's seat to her. Adult reassures her and moves into small group time* *Manager leaves to go to "work", engages in a discussion about socks*	*"oh, hoh, hoh hoh, oh, hoh, hoh hoh "(children laughing). Adult handles all these situations with warmth, humour and quite a battery of strategies to enable compliance. She offers reassurance to girl now fretting because the boy won't get off the adult's chair "it's ok, you sit there and we'll get your hammer and all, right?*
25:24		Adult organises materials for small group time; in the meantime the manager leaves to go to do "some hard work", but then engages in a discussion about socks.	
25:30		Adult distributes materials. Adult brings to the table bag of golf tees, a large lump of play-dough and some panel pin hammers. Girl climbing over table, adult gently assists her back to her chair. Adult gives her a lump of dough. Some children (3) still have break, others discussing socks. Manager leaves and children bring their plates to trolley and adult removes place mats. Adult ensure equal distribution of hammers, golf tees and play-dough. 4 children get engaged while one boy looks on and eats his break slowly.	I applaud the use of the hammers, very High/Scope, but also potentially dangerous. Interesting that it is the same boy who has not participated in the actual activity in two previous group experiences is slowly eating his break - although he is accepting the materials. Break and small group time are very intermingled. Distribution interactions "that's for you"... "there's your piece" "there's your tees";

27:34

43:30		(behind the table). The adult and 3 children (1 girl has left and 1 gone home) played rolling and using a variet shapes to make patterns in their play-dough. distraction regarding the trolley. Children worked at that for 15 minutes using dough rollers and cutters. Adult sits with the children for that time, Boy leaves and returns and leaves again. Girl the table. Adult leaves the table 1 boy left, the boy who was last to finish his He was now last to finish the play-dough. An activity ended.

roduces new materials, increasing novelty "I have other things
nake circles"; affirming children's work "X showed me how to
rlier on"; responding to children girl saying "look at mine"(x3).
ks and nods smiling;
g - offers advice on rolling dough more thinly;
edging children's contribution "it's like an owl" in response adult
y good, it does look like an owl", smiling and nodding and
g again by making owl noises. She smiling at all the children; she
ks like she is enjoying their company, happy to be there and at
matches children's expressions and mock horror and excitement.
rves and listen in attentively to one boy who speaks in a low tone,
es falls; physically helping a girl by gently holding her arm (the
pending so low she looked like she would fall off the chair)
ng & closed question" oh and its fits in your lid, does it?"
g (background noise in the room very quiet generally)
se to a child; "she will love them circles, won't she"
p on child's frustration "what's wrong"? And moving to listen
y. "Circle won't come out"? Play-dough could be too heavy"
explanation "it's thicker" ; offering help; commenting on size
y are getting smaller"
s with mock horror, when one child threatens adult with a
aughter; it turns into an octopus; asking questions (closed
– "how many legs does he have"?
owing herself to be rolled over with play-dough cutter. Naming
pointing out "don't hurt me; that would make me sad"; Warning
of my eye" "look at my eye"; staying within children's play
ocial conversation; picking up on child's utterance - "who's your
wonder pet"? Suggesting that child sing her favourite song
ouse. Child banging rolling pin on play-dough, picked up by
ce music" extending that imitating and changing sound "hear the
sounds"? Other's join in. Checking in with each child;
ng attention fairly

Observation log – Rowan; Day 4; Date: 13.05.2009; Part of routine: SG - '"Making play-dough"; Time: 11.22 – 11.49; Length: 27:00 minutes; Ratio 1:4

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
M 26 00:00 - 00: 47 M 27 00:00 - 01:48	00:00 04:06	*Recall time, was very brief this morning (approx 4 mins). 4 children (2 girls and 2 boys) were gathered around the table with the adult.* The children were recalling with a wheel which they rolled. A boy recalled first, the adult recorded in a file, a girl recalled next and adult recorded that in her file. The remaining two children chose not to recall and were interested in getting ready for break. Adult assisting in organising taking turns and checking did children need to go to the toilet; they all did.	*Adult asked "what did you do this morning"? ; "what else did you do"?; thanking the children after their responses; physically demonstrating with her finger going around the table clockwise "whose next"? like the wheel, accepting children's choice "that's all right";* *Adult responding to boy and girls initiative wanting to distribute mats and cups;* *Adult direction "we've to wash the tables and clean our hands"* *Responding to girl "I washed my hands in the toilet" responding with " Oh, that was a long time ago". She is very attuned to caring routines and children's needs such as using the toilet.*
M 28 00:00– 05:48 13:14 14:00 15:20		*Break time, the 4 children gathered around the table with their mats. One boy sits on adult's chair, and points this out to her.* *Adult distributes cheese; offers choice of apple or orange juice, offering choice of fruit; squatting down to each child; checking in with children. Talking about small group time* *Adult takes out file and starts writing, also checking with one girl did she want to make play-dough. Children continue eating their breaks, a boy and girl comparing the height of their arms, laughing and chatting amongst themselves; adult continues writing; one girl asks for more crackers; adult goes through the files writing; finishes her wiring and offers more juice and more cheese; and distributes same.* *Child getting upset over cracker; adult removes cracker from plate; girl leaves table; girl returns to table with adult assistance.* *Children helping themselves to plate of fruit left*	*Using humour; adult responds to child on chair by laughing and saying "that's all right, I'll just rob your chair"* *Explaining "leave your cups there, so they don't get knocked over"* *Checking in "is everyone ok"?* *Foreshadowing "do you know what we are going to do for small group time today"? "Because you've been having a lot of fun with play-dough in the last few days, we're going to make our own"!* *Warning "Be nice, be nice"!* *Forewarning "if you want more crackers you've got to eat them first"; listening attentively and restating "you don't like crackers"?; responding to new information, "That's all right, leave them on the plate if you don't want them"* *"Would you like some more"? "You are welcome" to boy who says thank you* *Adult physically going to child and squatting to her level; restating rules "we can't walk around the room with food; you sit down there and eat your food, O.K"? "O.K"? Girl nods, adult says "Thank you" in response. Repeats statement.* *Adult doesn't take up the opportunity for boy counting his fruit.* *Direction; giving responsibility; directing girl to go around table*

		on table; plate given to other table; 1 boy counting the prices of fruit on his plate. *Girl says she's finished, invited to bring food to tray and get aprons for small group time.* *Adult leaves table and returns files to shelf and brings back juice.* *Leaves again and returns with aprons, children chatting at table*	
16:32		Adult helps girl on with apron, and organises materials for small group time away from the table. She gets all the materials for SGT (flour, water, colouring, pasting sticks, coloured bowls).	No interactions between adult and children as she is not there; boy and girl in deep conversation, counting.
18:22 18:42 19:45	 17:33 18:30	Making play-dough Adult returns to table, she distributes bowls for everyone Adult leaves and returns with bowl of flour	I'm conscious of louder voices in the rest of the room. Foreshadowing "everybody has their own"; responding to girl's question "what's that for"? Naming and explaining in response "that's to make the colour of your play-dough" "we're going to have red play-dough see"? Offering choice of coloured bowl "do you want the orange one"? Identifying matching colour "you can have the same colour stick, right"? Encouraging boy who doesn't participate "which one would you like?" he doesn't respond, "I'll leave it for you there right"? He shakes his head; "No, you don't want to, no? O.K", directing "tidy up when you are ready"; don't touch them, ok"? (materials on floor)
    24:36 25:21 26:00	 Tape knocked off shelf and turned off.	Everyone makes their own play-dough, adult gets water and adds a bit into each bowl, then adds oil. "A boy from another group is attracted to the table and questions what's happening. Others join in. 3 boys cluster around Mary, fascinated. Katie leaves to get more materials. Boys get called by P2 to return to their own group table, but ignore the request. P2 makes a second call.	Adult instructs and affirms "Take 2 spoonfuls of flour, very good" ; ensuring turn taking, demonstrating pouring "a teeny tiny dribble" of food colouring, now "We'll add water "; acknowledging children's patience "I know you are *waiting*"; Responding to boy's initiative "what are you doing"? "We're just making some play-dough", Boy asks "what do you do"? Full explanation given; girl says "I want the red" adult in response says "oh sorry" and gives girl the food colouring, offering to come and help. Other boy saying "that's soups you are making-tomato soups"! Adult responds laughing "Do you think that looks like tomato soup"? Adult uses body language to demonstrate big wide stirring and suggests children "stir". Forewarning,

		Katie arrives back with oil. The three boys push each other, knocking things off the shelf. A third call comes for children to join their own group; one boy resists but P2 takes boy by the arm and leads him away - the other boys eventually follow."	warns boy not to taste 'soup', "you'll be very sick"; requesting that children are careful as there isn't much space where they are. This signifies the need for everyone in the room to co-operate with each other's SGT. The adult here did not show any irritation and handled it gently.
27:00 37:47	Tape on 00:26	Adult gets more water. Boy still eating his break and watching the others. Adult returns with water. Observes the children. Another boy arrives back to check what's happening now and asks about the food colouring and moves around to adult. A boy comments on his friends work; adult acknowledging that. Discussion about minding boundaries, the need to wash hands. Boy tidies up his break things and adult gives him made play-dough to play with, explaining he doesn't want to make it. Adult leaves, to bring bowls to sink; 2 boys left at table. I boy stirring away, 2nd boy playing with pre-made play-dough. Girl returns very full bowl of runny play-dough to sink and is met by adult who helps. Boy goes to wash hands. Adult cleaning the table, 1 boy left at table. Adult returns to clean table. Girls rejoin table requesting to play play-dough with her friend. Adult suggests she gets the play-dough box, girl can't find it. Adult cleans table and finds the box.	Encouraging children to express what they want – "more of..."? "More of what"? Response was "water"; adult makes suggestions to improve consistency "You might need more flour would you, to make the ply-dough"? "it's very watery"; enabling exploration, boy checking with adult is it ok to take flour, she nods ; describing using body language, "Oh, your mixing, mixing, mixing"; explaining where the food colour came from; Affirming boys noticing of a "square, a square" in his friends play-dough. "Ah yes it is a square" Forewarning – "no more flour left"; adult using her fingers and twiddling them, children matching to show red fingers,; offering choice "if you don't want to play with the play-dough you can play with play-dough that's already made". Explaining about sharing of resources; Direction; "Tidy up your Mammy's here to collect you"; asking for help in a non direct way, "Do you want to get some tissue to clean the table"; modelling manners "thank you"; direction "get the box of play-dough". Following through, getting box.

Observation log:Birch; Day 1; Date: 23/04/2009 Part of routine: Break time; Title: Breakfast and planning; Time: 9:56 – 12.03; Length: 22: 35; Ratio 1: 6

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
00:39	01:05	*Three adults organising breakfast and settling six children at the focus table for Break Time. Adult pouring drinks and then wondering whose turn it is? "James's turn". Children waiting for drinks to arrive. Drink poured by focus practitioner, handed to James by second adult. James negotiates his way between the two tables. Child trips over chairs not tucked into tables; my feet!; other children. Adult putting cereal into bowls, while the five children at table waiting.*	*Interactions by two adults on enabling collaborative behaviour, directing where to sit, explaining about turns, directing James to distribute drinks.* *Focus on organisation of breakfast*
03:00	03:26	*One girl kicks another under the table. Others were clapping hands together and laughing, occasionally looking around at other table.*	*Second practitioner, explaining, describing, "you are kicking her", "I see Emily crying"; Giving her the language, "don't kick me"; Directions about who the drink is for; which table. I wonder if two trays were brought in and left on the middle of each table and children help themselves. Adults less focussed on getting food to children and therefore can be more focussed on talking to children; greater chance of interactions, plus greater independence/engagement/learning/ of children enabled*
04:25	04:51	*First child gets drink at focus table,*	*Directions (about who the drink is for at James's own table).*
5:19	5:45	*Adult distributes bowls of breakfast cereal to the table.*	
06:26	06:52	*Adult sits down with the children.* *James says he doesn't want his cereal.* *James looks at the other table and says "I gave her, her breakfast" and points. That's "Ben's big sister Anna who was in for the morning.* *Chat about saying thank you, the school, what's for dinner, Talking about family roles and membership; Discussion on height; supporting children to eat; boy stretches his arms to demonstrate big – adult*	*Responsive "you don't want it"? Removing cereal bowl;* *Following children's conversational cues, social conversation, Using facial expression (mock horror); Drawing on children's own experiences; following children's conversational cues encouraging children to listen to each other, asking questions (closed "what's Rory's big brother's name"?); smiling; active listening/clarifying "bigger than a lion"? "bigger than Anna"; affirming "he is tall isn't he"; modelling children's physical actions;*

		copies; talking about measuring – children all stretching; *Adult encourages Megan to tell her news;*	*Enabling social conversation "Megan has some news"*
12:38	13:08	*Educator moves into planning time individually with Tony who had left the table;* *Retrieving juice and extra cereal for second helpings; she fills and extra bowl of cereal for Kevin and leaves; offering to give more to another child when her bowl was finished; Moving her seat at the suggestion of Michelle; James showing his sticky fingers,* *Kevin interested in the milk jug;* *Megan picks up her bowl and drinks from it;*	*Questioning; affirming choice "ok";* *Responding to children;* *Responding to children – moving seat;* *Responding to children - "do you need to wash your hands" using non verbal language – rubbing her fingers modelling stickiness from juice;* *Responding to children's questions "What's that"?* *Describing "she's drinking the milk"*
16:10	16:27	*Showing how much cereal is left; Emptying bag of cereal; Showing child where to put the empty bag into the bin;* *Tidying away items*	*Demonstration;* *Direction* *Modelling appreciation "thank you"*
16:45	17:17	*Stroking James's head; working with children's (three) plans.* *Kevin standing up* *Adult suggests to James when you are finished you can go and play; boy finishes juice but waits*	*Questioning (open-ended); "You are going to play with me"? What are we going to play with"? Affirming children's responses "that sounds like fun"* *Direction "sit on your bum"; giving explanation "you'll fall"*

19:15	19: 41	*Adult gathering empty dishes; very brief discussion with other adult about getting new dishwasher; returns to table – Kevin wants more juice, James moves around table and comes to adult and she picks him up and he settles in on her knee. Mollie and Kevin still eating.* *Adult playing peek-a-boo (without the 'boo') with James' hood.* *Michelle shaking her head. Adult strokes her hair Kevin starts shaking his head, adult puts out her hand and places it on Kevin's arm.* *Kevin's finished his cereal* *Adult engages in planning with Kevin*	*Organising* *Responding* *Offering comfort- giving physical reassurance* *Being playful* *Physical comfort and explanation; "Michelle you'll get a sore head".* *Physical attention getting; "Kevin you'll get a sore head"* *Direction "Ok will you put it up on the tray please?; removing barrier for Kevin to get to tray.*
21:02	21: 28	*James on practitioner's knee, Michelle still eating breakfast;* *Michelle finishes gives plate to practitioner; tucks in chair.* *James get's off practitioner's knee and all three leave the table*	*Holding physically comfort of James, putting dish on tray, checking with James – supporting transition to play "are you ready"? Energising the children to move on*

Observation log – Birch; Day 1; Date: 23/04/2009;Part of routine: SG- 'Making necklaces & bracelets'; Time: 11.25–12.03; Length: 39:17; Ratio 1: 6

Recorder position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Organising table, and settling children at the table. Children were James, Tony, Rory, Kevin, & Amy. Amy and Rory pulling the table apart (it consists of two semi-circles).	Engages in direct teaching - giving directions Direction "Kevin you need to get a chair" – "Is that ok; is it all right like that"? explaining "I don't want anyone to catch their fingers"
01:00	00:20	Introducing SGA activity. Adult has materials prepared on the shelves beside her (bowls, string, beads).	Foreshadowing "do you know what we are going to do today"? Offering choice "I'm going to ask everyone which colour they'd like"
01:20	00:40	Adult arrives with a chair, adult takes it puts it between Kevin and Amy's chairs' and Suzie joins the table. Amy immediately moves her chair to be as far away from Suzie (who says "I'm not sitting beside her"). Suzie in the meantime has a scuffle with Kevin and hits him with rolled up fists. Kevin holds up his hand and waves it after the safe hands, Suzie reciprocates and the two children hold hands and laugh at each other.	I'm not sure this is noticed by practitioner; Enabling collaborative behaviour – physically holding her hand and saying "Suzie, you need to be nice to your friends"; "safe hands"; "safe hands"
01:40	1:00	Adult retrieves materials from shelf and sits down, children enthusiastically putting hands in the air and saying "me, me". Adult explains where she is going to start and how that will be managed. She begins with James and asks what colour string would he like. She goes around each child, identifying colours, checking if they are the same. Tony speaking very loudly Adult distributes bowls of beads, offering to give more	Foreshadowing "What colour string would you like James"; reassuring "Yes, with nodding head I'll come around"; ensuring joint engagement "did everyone see James's colour"? repeat reassurance; physically holding children's hands to calm and get attention Noise reduction strategy; She almost whispers "Tony, I'm right beside you, no need to shout";
3:56	3:16	Adult ties a knot in one string Suzie drops a bead Adult queries does Suzie have a bead in her	Explaining "you need to put a knot at the end or they'll fall off" Reassurance and direction "It's ok, you can pick it up" Providing feedback and reprimanding in a strong tone "you do have one

		mouth, Suzie denies it. Adult continues to tie knots in all the one string	in your mouth; that's disgusting"; explaining "you might choke on that"
5:27	4:47	Adult and children settled at table; adult threading beads, and joining in the general conversation	Referring Amy to Rory to see how he threads his beads. Directing children not to put beads in their mouths; demonstrating where to put the beads on "you put them on here"; demonstrating what to do with the beads; smiling; scanning the table to see how everyone is getting on; listening in and responding to conversation on how big the children are. "you are both three" and I'm 23"; physically helping child sit on chair; responding to expressed frustration, "it's ok Suzie"
7:19	6: 39	Amy sings a song; adult bops along to the beat... Suzie says "you not know that song" Tony suggested them to teach the song to us	Smiling and moving with the beat; responding to child's initiation; referring James to ask Amy to sing it again; Confirming Amy's singing "She does know that song and she's singing it for her friends". Affirming Suzie; "Suzie knows the song too; you could both sing it" Affirming Tony's suggestion. "did you hear what Tony said"; directing not to open knot "because they will all fall off"; Demonstrating putting the necklace on over her head;
11: 07		Tony says he's finished; Suzie makes noise with the bowl and dish; James asks for help; Suzie continues to make noise	Consulting with child "are you finished; placing her hand on the bowl to physically stop Suzie from shaking the beads, which was noisy. Clarifying - Suzie "you don't want to do this"? Confirming "you don't want to do it"? Suzie protests - "Oh you are";
11:58	11:18	Rory is finished and goes to adult for her to tie the string together. Adult suggests for Rory to do another one. Tony also goes to have his necklace tied. Rory comes back to the table.	Responding to children's need for help; Making suggestions, "do another one"? Direct direction "Sit down then please because we are not finished".
12:40	12:00	Suzie shaking her bowl. Rory playing with his beads, Tony sitting down to do another one; James on the floor, he gets up on to his chair. Suzie shaking her bowl and says she's wants more. Adult moves the bowl into the middle of the	Giving feedback, Suzie, "you're spilling them, they need to go on your necklace" Offering limited choice - "you can give it back to me or do another one"? Adult uses her hands to indicate upwards movement saying "up, up". "Orange or yellow Tony"? "Orange or yellow Rory"?

		table. Adult gives Tony new string, who wants to make a bracelet Adult gives Rory new string. Suzie looks on, arms folded on the table, continually saying "I want more" Educator- she's got some in her bowl.	Adult lifting bowl and saying "you have some"
13:17	12:37	Amy moves over to practitioner, who begins to help James tie his string. Suzie starts playing with the string, continually saying "I want more" Adult now helps Amy; I don't see what happens but adult says "that's not safe". Amy reacts with an ahh and walks away round the table and sits in a corner away from the table. Adult talks to Amy	Adult talking about making bracelets, the bracelet in the bowl Adult follows her with her eyes. She looks surprised, Talks to Amy "ok, will I put this (necklace) back here"? Amy gives another cry. P says "Amy you need to speak to me; I don't know what the problem is"?
14:47	14:04	Adult offers to help Kevin, James suggests he does it on his own Adult notices Suzie putting beads in her mouth. Suzie says "Oh my God, give me my bowl" Suzie starts shaking her bowl; adult puts her hand on the bowl and asks. Suzie shakes bowl again. Adult takes Suzie's hands off the bowl and moves it into the middle of the table. "Are you ready to make your necklace yet, Suzie continues to shake bowl, I'll mind them so until you're ready"? I'll mind them until you're ready" Adult attends to James, Tony and Rory. Suzie says she wants her bowl back. Adult gives it to her. All the while Suzie twiddles her fingers in the bowl stirring the beads around.	"You put a jewel on and I'll hold it"; encouraging – "you show me how to do it" "I think you should" "you got it" "Suzie please take the bead out of your mouth"; explaining "it's not for eating" P says "it's there" "Are you ready to put the beads on your necklace yet"?
17:58	17:18	Adult removes bowl and Suzie's string from table, Suzie has a full scale temper tantrum. Rory puts his hands over his ears and says "stop"; both Rory	"Suzie, that's ok, you don't need this, ok; it's fine; you have some in your bowl but you are not using them". Suzie responds "I am"; "I am"; "Yes, I am" in ever louder voice.

		and Tyron in unison saying "Stop, stop"	Adult names feelings "you are getting upset"; "please don't shout at me like that";
19:03		Suzie stops shouting; Adult remains very calm and finally holds her hand and says "Stop; that's enough Suzie" she queries the problem Discussion on loudness and how it hurts people's ears to have screaming. James bangs his head off the table. Adult strokes James's head. Discussion on children screaming hurting ears continues. Suzie asks "will you do that" (put beads on string)	Adult remains calm, checks other children, "Suzie, what's the problem"? She responds "I want my bowl". Are you ready to make your necklace now? Later, "Please don't scream like that again, your friends don't like it and I don't like it". Encouraging independence "you need to try yourself"
20:08		Ben comes to the table and sits on Amy's chair. Amy pulls the chair from under him. He falls down.	Adult looked shocked initially, remaining where she was, said "Amy; that's not ok; that's very dangerous". Amy sits down on the chair. Second adult rushes over to talk to Amy and asks' "what's the problem"? She helps Luke up, encourages Amy to use her words.
21:03		Suzie accuses Amy of being bold. Adult checking in on three children left. Rory heading for area where children go to the toilet. Suzie blows raspberries at Amy. Amy makes a run at Suzie, but second adult steers her away. James, Kevin and Suzie at table.	Adult reprimanding in saying it's all right to Suzie. Responding to children's waning interest. Suggesting "do you want to get a book so"? Monitoring James's concern over Kevin wanting to use jewels. Adult pointing out other available beads.
22:33		Megan arrives and takes Suzie's bowl. Suzie protests. Adult reminding Megan to use her words. Megan leaves and comes back. Adult focussing on Suzie "you've only one jewel on your -your string" Suzie shakes the bowl while looking occasionally at p. Adult removes bowl again. Suzie starts creaming again. repeats "don't shout at me". S says I want some beads, adult points out "they are all over the table", Sara starts climbing on the table, p checks what she looking for and suggests she go around the table; Suzie complies and joins James and p. She then runs off to the toilet area. P gets up to get	Enabling collaborative behaviour "use your words Megan". Refocusing onto the task. Using a learning moment; the beads fall "see look what happens; they fall"; reprimanding; extending??

		her; lifting Kevin onto his chair on route.	
25:53		Adult rejoins Kevin and James. Luke arrives to join in. Getting bowl of beads for Luke Celebrating success Kevin puts string around his neck Kevin encouraged to see himself in the mirror.	Enables independence; "do you want to give it a try"? Enabling co-operation, building James's confidence; "you should Luke how to do it Cheering Luke on; "Hurrah, you did it" Monitoring for safety Offering assistance "Kevin will I put it on you"? Remaining focused; responding to Luke's "it's breaking off" Encouraging; celebrating
28:24		James and Luke at table, Michelle arrives and picks up Amy's string and turns it upside down. P warns not to take beads off the string, but to put one on Incident out of camera and tapes view with Megan and other practitioners.	Monitoring/forewarning
30:54		Three children quietly focussed on threading James goes to the toilet, adult offers to mind his string and asks should she continue on her own? Megan picks up loose beads and again p offers to mind string Working with Luke to thread the bead and celebrating his success. Megan joins in, warmly greeted with a smile. She puts beads on table into the bowl and finds others. Thanked by adult. Adult invites Megan to come over and sit beside her on James's chair	Demonstrating (where the knot is) Responding to child's initiative "don't eat them" (Luke to Megan); and affirming "no we don't eat them. Direction, affirmation ("oh Thanks") Physical presence; patiently with Luke. Positive relationship building, extending - adult offers Megan a bowl to hold the beads she's finding on the table. Forewarning, "if James comes back from the loo, he might want to sit there".
36:08		Adult working with Luke, helping Michelle tie her bracelet up and chatting with Megan about food ("the chipper") Activity naturally ended when dinner arrived.	Listening attentively; responding to children – whether they wanted their strings on arms or necks

Observation log Birch; Day 2;Date: 30.04.2009; Part of routine: Planning & Break time; Title: Planning & Breakfast; Time: 9:34; Length:18.25;Ratio 1: 5

Recorder Position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Children settling around the table; adult with 5 children Individual plans are recorded by educator in individualised notebooks	*Direction to put notebook back in basket for p to "mind it for a minute", offering assistance- help with Emily's cardigan , direction – "put it in your box"; direction – putting items away*
00:57	00:12	*Identifying group members from pictures on individual notebooks randomly selected and held up by practitioner. First picture is of Kevin, who was not in today,*	*Holding picture for easy visibility of everyone; attention getting device; checking in with children "are you ready"? (next picture); asking questions (who's picture is this"?*
01:20	00:35	*Individual planning with Rory*	*Asking open-ended questions "what are you going to do with", "where are you going to be"?; encouraging specific planning, "which would you like to play with first" "who are you going to play with" "what are you going to make"; drawing other children's attention to listen to Rory's plan; clarifying the plan;*
02:30	01:46	*Individual planning with Emily*	*Asking open-ended questions "what are you going to do today"; encouraging specific planning - "what friends at the table are you going to play with"? Identifying children for Emily; affirming through repeating her plan, "she wants to play with you Tony", "and who else are you going to play with today", extending – (to James who said he wanted to play with Emily) – "you can plan for that so"; giving the book to Emily to mind.*
03:11	02:28	*Individual planning with Tony*	*Asking open-ended questions; encouraging specific planning; drawing other children's attention to listen Tony's plan's; listening actively; repeating plan, clarifying; offering opportunity to make further plans when those plans are finished;*
04:36	03:51	*Individual planning with James, Megan puts her shoe son the table, she gets up to sit on table to put shoes on, does so and sits back down again.*	*Directing – "take shoes off the table"; asking open-ended questions "James what's your plan today"?; encouraging specific planning – where in the room are you going to play"?; encouraging James to speak up "because your friends can't hear you"? Encouraging naming; affirming "the gate"; emphasising pronunciation "the gate"; encouraging thinking – "whose left to make a plan"?*

06:19		*Individual planning with Megan, who gets up and down from her seat.*	*Direction to sit down; asking open-ended questions "where are you going to play today"; encouraging specific planning – where in the room are you going to play"; drawing other children's attention to listen to Megan's plan's;*
07:13	06:42	*Basket passed around to gather the notebooks, some children had wanted to write their own plans*	*Building on child's request "after breakfast, I'll give you pens and you can write your own plans"*
07:48		*Adult gets up to help with breakfast, identifying turn taker to distribute drinks, p ladles porridge into bowls, all children leave the table except Tony*	
09: 40		*Adult goes around to each child and asks them to come back to the table*	*Physical intervention, direction "please sit down"*
09: 57		*Children settled back at table, Tony and Rory engaging in mock "eating your arm"; & wrestling while laughing, Megan retrieved a doll and sat down, Emily out of camera and earshot, James slapping the table. Adult from other table addresses Rory & Tony, telling them to stop. Adult distributes bowls of porridge; she leaves one on the table for Emily. Emily picks up the bowl and spoon and tries to get her whole face into the bowl. Her friends say "just eat it", they all look at her and get adults attention "look, look". Adult notices* *Boys continue mock hand wrestling, Megan and James looking at what is happening at other table* *Adult pours and distributes drinks*	*Interactions involved moving Megan on her chair closer to the table, asking Emily "are you ready to sit down for breakfast"? "Emily sit down and eat your breakfast please, with your spoon please"? She repeats this;* *Discussion on whether people had said thank you. Children then said Thank you" Response "you're welcome"*

14:01		*Adult gets to sit down. She distributes seconds in porridge and milk but from sitting at the table.*	*"I'm going to sit down now"* *Clarifying and directing "are you finished with that?" Rory nods his head ""Ok, put it up on the tray there please"? "Eat your breakfast please Megan"?*
14:56		*Rory, Tony and leave the table,* *Emily brings her dish over to adult to put on the tray.*	*Refocusing "Rory and Tony what was your plan"? Rory repeats his plan ("going to the kitchen") as does Tony ("going in the kitchen too")*
15:18		*James and Megan left at the table, adult notices Emily struggling with the gate*	*Enabling collaborative behaviour – "Rory will you help Emily open the door"? Repeat and "she wants to go in".*
16:08		*James puts his glass and bowl on tray and leaves* *Megan had left the table with the bowl in her hand,* *Adult keeping an eye on the home corner while staying at the table with Megan, who wants more porridge.*	*Affirmation "thank you"* *Direction "sit down please" explanation "that's why it's spilling on your top" "I showed you it was all finished", repeats the demonstration by showing her the empty bowl. Adult gives Megan a drink of milk.*

Observation log – Birch; Day 2; Date: 30.04.2009; Part of routine: Recall & Small Group Time; Title: Play-dough; Time: 11:14; Length: 37.41; Ratio 1: 5

Recorder Position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Children sitting at table located in art area for recall time. *Adult held a box containing up individual notebooks. She randomly selected a notebook, the first was Amy. She read the original plan and then followed up and recorded what did happen.*	*Did you get a chance to that? Amy shook her head "No?" "You were too busy today? Asking open-ended questions "who did you play with today"?*
01:25	2:18	*Adult pulls the next notebook out of the basket and asks for identification. It's Tony's*	*Holding picture for easy visibility of everyone; attention getting device; asking specific questions "whose picture is this"? "can you remember your plan today? "what are their names"; encouraging children to listen to each other "Amy, it's Tony's turn"; adult in dialogue reminding them of original plan, asking did he get to do that and "what else did you play with"? repeating question; reminding Tony of shared experience – reading a story in the home corner and asking specific questions about it ;*
02:52	03:45	*Adult pulls the next notebook out of the basket and asks for identification. It's Rory's*	*As above, referring to original plan, stating what was in it and confirming whether that happened or not. Thanking Rory,*
03:42	04:36	*Adult pulls the next notebook out of the basket and asks for identification. It's James*	*As above, referring to original plan, stating what was in it and confirming whether that happened or not. Naming all the friends James played with. Specific questions "what did you play with Amy"? "what area were you in"? Thanking,*
05:00	05:53	*Adult pulls the next notebook out of the basket and asks 'who's left"? Suzie.* *Adult then recalls where she played today.* *Rory said he'd like to; adult stating tomorrow he could plan for that. Books gathered into the basket as it's small group time*	*Encouraging thinking, Suzie initially reluctant to speak, adult going through original plan, Suzie then starts recalling "I played with Amy and continued. Encouraging friendship, p referred back to Amy "she said she played with you"* *Modelling recall skills, reading "stories", asking children to remember what else she did; waving her fingers as a hint and affirming "that's right , I painted nails with Amy, Suzie and James"* *Responding to children; extending the idea for tomorrow's plan; directing "put books in basket"*

07:05	07:58	Adult says she's going to get materials for small group time she goes to adjacent press and gathers up one large bowl, one bowl of shapes, one large spoon, mats, flour and other materials. She asks Amy to distribute the mats and put extras in the press.	Direction
09:01		Adult sits down at table with materials. Children pass around a big bowl and take one spoonful of flour to spoon into the bowl, stir it and to pass onto their friends. Adult holds the flour container. Repeats process with flour and liquid. Adult asks for extra flour from neighbouring table. Adult adds more flour and asks who wants some play-dough.	Ensuring each child gets a turn. Encouraging thinking "what else do we need to make play-dough"; encouraging turn taking "Amy can you give James a turn please", "can you pass it to Suzie please James and give Suzie a turn"? direct teaching - reminding them of the last time they made it and how sticky it was and how they needed more flour to be able to use it as play –dough.
15:32		Adult distributes play-dough to Rory and then to all children clockwise, tearing it into little balls and kneading it with flour. She does this for each child. In the meantime Rory is asked to distribute rolling pins and cutters. All the children have play-dough, rollers and cutters.	More engagement by the children? Perhaps each individually making their own play-dough, getting to knead the play-dough themselves. Responding to children's request (Rory asked to get the rollers); direction – distribute them to your friends, affirmation –thank you, interpreting for children as he goes around "she wants to get the cutter to make shapes"; p physically moving around to each child; commenting/feedback on Rory's lovely manners- he hadn't taken items for himself first; repeating children's utterances "you said I got loads.."; directing – "dip your play-dough in the flour and mix it in"
17:45	18:36	Amy asks "I want a cutter", Rory and Amy get scissors; children all engrossed in working with the dough, with a lot of talk.	P leaves briefly to bring material to sink area and returns; modelling - she has play-dough herself and starts playing with it; asks open-ended questions "what are you making"; drawing on their experiences/interests- referring to children's earlier plans; making jokes; smiling; dialogue about pizza, P Amy, Rory – shared thinking? Asking children's help (can I have a cutter?); song/discussion about bumble bee; using expressive language "look how smooth that is"; mock horror "you're going to cut his head off"? scratching her elbow and naming it "itchy elbow"; reacting when James was going to throw scissors to her "oh, nonononono.... with hands up as barrier that's dangerous" modelling making patterns with her play-dough;

21:48	22:42	Amy talks about her pizza; adult responds other children join in. Megan from neighbouring table comes over and returns and the repeats bring play-dough with her (both tables are making play-dough); children engaged in discussion, all looking at each other.	Responding to child's initiative "Look what I'm making"; "what are you making"? "Pizza" in response "Mmm I love pizza"; smiling; looking really interested in what the children are saying; refocusing on play-dough; commenting on taste as Rory/Tony? Puts some in their mouths "it doesn't taste nice".
25:42	25:55	Adult leaves table briefly to get a tissue; returns and cleans Rory's face, which is covered in flour. Talks to children about their creations. Children making trains, picnics, their ma, pizzas, faces. Suzie talks about who she is making mammy and daddy, changes her mind and p suggests her sister.	Physical assistance; explaining; laughing (Rory wiped his face with his t-shirt which was also covered in flour); dealing with interruptions from Megan "tanks Megan, that's enough"; supporting/extending play – creating 'pepperoni' for Rory's pizza; suggesting names for the train; picking up on their initiations "oh where are you going for the picnic"; dealing with interruptions from other children at other table; talking about future events – a picnic with families later on in the year"; open-ended questioning "what else do we need" (not waiting for response); making suggestions "can you make hair for me"? talking about things that are meaningful for children –family members
29: 41	30:33	The children from the other table have all left and are running around the focus table. Michelle engages in something (I didn't see) of serious concern to other adult s (discussion on that's "so dangerous"). Hard to pick up dialogue which continues at the focus table. Suzie leaves the table, p calls and then holds her back, cuddling her. She settles back in her chair. She tries to go again, again sits back after another talk with Sarah.	Physically holding; scaffolding; responding to child initiation

30:58		Other children washing their hands, practitioner's needs to maintain children at the table as there isn't enough space for everyone to wash their hands. Suzie leaves again as does Amy.	P needs to think on her feet – she extends the 'pizza making' – "did you put the pizza in the oven"? "No" in response - mock horror with hand and facial expression; calling Amy directly (who'd left) and asking specific question; had she put her pizza in the oven? Suzie returns also; refocusing, extending, making it interesting/
32: 27		Suzie and Amy gone again,	Physically holding, Suzie; requesting "please don't scream at me"; engaging in real play dramatically receiving pizza from Rory throwing pizza from one hand to the other saying "hot, hot, hot" until on the table; pretending to taste it; smiling; encouraging children to blow on the pizza to cool it down; directing tidy up; ensuring people are finished
33: 44	34:35	Adult gets play-dough box; tidying up materials	Asking for help; direction; offering appreciation

Observation log Birch; Day 3; Date: 08.05.2009 Part of routine: Planning + Breakfast; Time; Title: Same: 9:45; Length: 22:15; Ratio 2:5

Recorder Position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Children are settled around the table in the table top area and press where meals are distributed for planning time. Individualised notebooks are used to record plans and stickle bricks are used to make planning interesting. Each child chooses a stickle brick from a basket and then the second adult closes their eyes and picks out a matching colour from her bag and that child plans. In order from adult Tony, James, Rory, Emily & Megan.	*Adult (adult) explains that the second adult is going to plan a new way this morning; introducing novelty, second adult reminding children "do you remember?" "do you want to tell adult"? And explaining to adult the system "do you remember what we did? Everyone has a colour and then we pick a colour from the bag and that's whose turn it is".*
1:26	0:56	*Checking that everyone has a colour*	*Asking specific questions; "what colour have you got"? of each child; direction "I've got my eyes closed"; creating anticipation and surprise; encouraging thinking skills "whose turn is it"?*
2:15	01:54	*Planning with individual children and recording in individualised notebook; in order of Rory, Emily, James, Tony and Megan. Books are collected into the basket for breakfast.*	*Asking open-ended questions "what's your plan today so"; Active listening/listening attentively; clarifying and repeating plan "stickle bricks"; "what are you going to do with them", "who are you going to play with, what friends"; creating anticipation "oh what colour is adult going to pull out – watch "where are you going to be"?; "what would you like to do; smiling – enjoying children's responses; encouraging specific planning, "what book are you going to read" following James's gaze and identifying the book "star book"; specific planning "who are you going to read with"? giving children their book; drawing other children's attention to listen to other's plans; clarifying the plan; explaining "I'm listening to Tony's plan now"; checking that other's heard the plan; enabling collaborative behaviour/encouraging friendships "Tony said he would read the star book with you Rory, did you hear that"?; James points out his plan with Emily; scaffolding – maybe you could make another plan and you all read together"? James adamant he wants to be with "just Emily", this was not picked up by educator.*

09:30 13:14 15:16 15:48	Audio off	*Adult leaves to get breakfast organised; Rory leaves, Tony moves to Rory's seat, James stays where he is, Megan, Emily leaves, Rory comes back and approaches Tony and tries to pull him off the seat. Noel from the second table is elected to be the helper. Emily gets a drink first then James. Second adult comes over to Tony and Rory and engages in conflict resolution talking about feeling angry and why. James gets involved. In the meantime Megan and Tony get a drink The cereal is being distributed and Tony returns to his chair.* *Second adult leaves to get a drink for Rory, children chatting among themselves about whether they like Just right or not.* *Adult returns to the table and sits down with the children. Children showing her their empty glasses, requesting more porridge.* *She leaves to get some more food and drink, Megan brings adult her empty bowl, adult returns; Interruption from Suzie, educator, stirs her porridge for her,* *James asks for more, adult gets it; Tony looks on.* *Tony holds her arm (he originally didn't want any ready break), adult offers him some porridge and goes to get it. Emily, Rory and Megan leave the table.*	*Adult organising drinks and cereal for breakfast.* *Organising – "do you want porridge Rory"; accepting his response "I don't like porridge"* *Giving feedback "you were very thirsty"* *Physically caring, helping Suzie to get the honey mixed in to her food; directing Suzie back to her seat* *Organising, meeting physical need (hunger?)*

16: 58		*Adult returns with porridge for Tony. Checks in with other children. Tony takes a few tastes but gives the bowl to educator.*	*Talking about earlier conversation when Tony had said he'd had 'wheatabix' at home; smiling; giving feedback "you are very hungry James; questioning "do you not like it"?; offering suggestions "maybe you don't like honey – do you want to taste a bit without honey"?; accepting refusal; directing "no"? "you can put the bowl on the tray so".*
17:49		*Ensuring Megan has her breakfast, encouraging neatness* *James asks where's educator's phone;* *All other children up and playing; tidying up ensuring children bring their bowls to tray,*	*Organising, meeting physical need (hunger?) – "Megan, this is your breakfast"; encouraging neatness "please don't let it spill onto the table"; explaining, "I left the 'phone at home today"; comforting "we do have a phone over there, if we have to ring any mammies"; responding to James "we can't take it off the wall", extending - "there's one over there in the home corner" – "who do you want to ring"?* *Smiling; giving feedback – "that's nice signing"; organising*

Birch; Day 3; Date: 08.05.2009; Part of routine: Recall+ SG Time; 11:30 Title: 'Making people'; Length of vignette: 18: 22:15; Ratio 2:5

Recorder Position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Children are settling around the table in the table top area and press where meals are distributed for verbal recall and small group time. Emily sits down and Michelle sits down on same chair; second adult puts another chair at the table and she sits there; Emily leaves and is redirected back; Megan comes to the table and runs to her own cubby to get her book and returns, Michelle gets up and sings "oh hokey, hokey cokey"; .	*Organising, directing children to seats; explaining "Emily's sitting there"; "there's a small chair", suggesting that children "find your own chair"; refocusing/attracting to the table "Michelle are you ready"?; Second adult encourages Michelle to join the group and recall.*
01: 34	01:13	*Recall starts - Individualised notebooks are used to record what the children did during work time.* *Adult has the basket of individualised books. Children clockwise from adult include Emily, Noel, second adult, Michelle, Megan and Ben. Dispute breaks out between the two girls, as both had played with Tony on different occasions. One spits at the other. Second adult deals with this talking about feelings and how she would not like to be spat at.* *Continuing recall with Noel* *Emily, Noel, Michelle, Megan leave and go into home corner where in an effort to get in they almost knock down a mirrored divider. Adult then begins to gather the children to table.*	*Asking open-ended questions -"can you remember what you played with today"? "What did you and Tony do"? "What did you and me do"?; Asking specific questions (closed)- "Did you get to play with Tony today"? Going around each child. Listening attentively and recording responses; encouraging children to listen to each other;* *Adult gives Megan another chance to recall, checking if she was finished, returned to recall. Refocusing - Adult reminded her that that was her plan Asking open-ended questions; Asking specific questions.* *Adult remains at table, finishing her recording*
08:09	07:51	Gathering children to the table, who were dispersed? Ben settling down with threading board; Emily cross to have been picked up by	Organising; minimal interaction

		adult and placed on her chair; Michelle comes to the table but leaves again, Noel comes to the table, Emily leaves, Noel and Ben get up and try to drink juice from the big carton; Adult at sink area getting materials; second adult approaches children drinking asking "are we allowed to drink out of that"? Adult returns to the table with the materials and the children settle down again; adult sits down at the table. Megan wants her chair, Adult moves.	Adult apologises "sorry Megan, I didn't realise"
10:07	09:46	Small Group Time – making people- sticking and pasting. Adult asking children "Who are you making? She distributes the materials doilies, paste, and sticks. She slid the glue pot with pasting stick to those at the far end of the table. The second adult was also offered the materials. The children immediately started pasting the doily.	Stating activity "who are we going to make today"; drawing on children's own families, "you can make Mammy or Daddy or Sophie(to Ben, Sophie is his big sister)", Who is Megan going to make today? Accepting response "Pamela" repeating "Pamela"; including each child and asking their choice of who they are going to make; asking specific questions "what colour is our glue today"?; "green" as a response ignored, giving hint "it's p,p,p,p" "pink" is the response.
11:27	11:00	Michelle raises her pasting stick with some paste on it in the air, let's the paste drip on to her finger and sings "here it's coming dowen"; Emily puts paste on her doily and her hand in it immediately. Megan sings again loudly Second adult wonders about needing things to stick on. Adult says "oh I forgot". She names the materials. Then each child was given the bowl with the materials in it. There were lots of other materials in the bowl which were unnamed. The children stuck the materials onto the pasted page. Adult then offered some hair to those who want it. Ben takes a feather and strokes educator's cheek. She acknowledges that it's soft; some discussion on feathers and Megan also strokes educator's cheek and vice versa.	Direction – "not on your hand – on the doily", "not with your hand Emily"; explanation – "it'll be sticky" Noise reduction strategies, whispering "that's very loud Megan" Naming some of the materials - adult said that there were "eyes, and sticks for their arms and sticks for their legs"; individual distribution – "this is for Ben, this is for Emily" and so on. Asking specific questions "who are you making Noel", smiling at him, his response "James Bond". Adult repeats "James Bond? Wow"! Focusing attention to the pasting "What do you need"? Giving feedback - "You've stuck your eyes down onto the page"; questioning "Where are you putting the other eye"? affirming - repeating utterances; physically indicating where things go with her finger; watching what the children were doing; writing names on children's work; distributing new doilies; directing

		Megan is retrieved from neighbouring table; greater examination of the contents of the bowls; acknowledging sticky hands and the need to clean them. Adult names 'people' and artists and brings them over to the shelf to dry.	"not on your hands, on the page"; extending "who wants hair"? response "me", "me", "me"; responds to Ben's feather "oh it's lovely and soft"; using it on Megan's cheek; repeat; questioning "did you put any feathers on it"? Direction "stick them on, is that Allanah"? affirming his response "oh Mammy"; direction "don't tear it"; identifying "a black one" (a feather); identifying and naming contents of bowl for Megan "a butterfly", "a bunny rabbit", smiling; modelling personal behaviours/affirming children when they bring her their work "thanks Emily".
20:10	19:50	Adult returns to table, holds her hands forward and wiggles her fingers saying you'll have sticky hands. She encourages Megan to make a hand print of sticky paste on a doily and then to look at it. Sound from neighbouring table of adult singing quite loudly. Adult: adult interaction "she won't last" laughing.	Forewarning - "you are all going to have sticky hands"; encouraging exploration/extending – making paste prints; naming/identifying "stuck"; change in attitude from adult towards children getting paste on their hands. Offering more materials;
21: 57	22:37	Second adult at table suggests that Michelle let's adult listen to the "squidgy sound" of paste in Megan's hand. Adult points to her ear and encourages Megan to let her hear. Ben asked also, but refuses.	Encouraging "let me hear the sound"; offering feedback and extending (new word?) "Oh its squelchy, squelchy", "yeah" in response from MC. Smiling and squeezing and un-squeezing fingers"; encouraging Michelle to let Megan hear it; enabling collaborative behaviour, encouraging friendships; following through with Megan "did you hear it"? Megan smiling; affirmation of Ben's refusal – "no".
22: 37	22:17	Adult asks Noel about his previous plan. Noel looks at her and nods. He continues to paste his hands. Adult offers him another doily. He nods. Megan working away pasting doilies; Ben gets up and follows second adult to wash his hands. Noel picks up his t-shirt and starts pasting his tummy.	Initiating dialogue with Noel – "how is your James bond coming along"? He looks at her and she repeats. He points to his work. Adult asks "are you finished"? he nods, she extends "Oh James Bond 007"; anticipating a need/extending his play by giving him another doily; directing – "put your hand on it" Naming/identifying/providing language "yes, a hand print"; extending "will I paint it" (her hands) repeat, Megan says "yeah"; feedback/commenting "you haven't got much [paste] left"; Anticipating his need "do you want to go and get your hands washed" Ben nods his head "yes that's fine"; Direction "oh no, not on your tummy, not on your tummy Noel", explaining "it will stick to your clothes and be very uncomfortable";

		Megan, Michelle and Noel at the table. No leaves Michelle puts something (a feather dipped paste) in her mouth; Megan asks for more Michelle comes back from bin and plays ' fingers' [a prolonged high five] with educa They see if they will stick together. Mega Michelle laugh and Megan joins in too an eventually with each other. Amy joins the asks "what you doing"? Ends with biting incident. The episode finally ended when a child go bitten by another child and the remaining children at the table went to see what happ and the adult was required to prevent boys kicking the door to the toilet.

g/direction/encouraging "just do it on your hands and you can put
ds on the pages". Noel does so - affirming "yeah that's right",
makes a hand print.
edback "your two hands are stuck"; clarifying "are you going to
r hands Noel"? response "yeah";
ng "that's not for eating"; direction – "put it in the bin please"
egan says ***, "It needs to go into the bin; it's been in your

ays "need more, need more", adult affirms "you need more

g/encouraging/extending adult says "let's see if we stick together"?
[to Amy] " we are making sticky hands, we were making James
our mammies and daddies"; "do you want to make one Amy"? ,

Observation Log- Birch; Day 4; Date: 14.05.2009 Part of routine: Planning + Breakfast; Time: 9:39; Title: Same; Length: 26:53; Ratio 1:5

Recorder Position		Description of activity	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio	Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	
		Adult sat at the table in the table top area for planning time and went around each child asking who or what they were planning to play with that day. Clockwise from adult the children were Emily, James, Rory, Kevin and Tony. Tony planned first, then James, then Kevin, then Rory and finally Emily. Adult then recorded the plan in their individualised planning and recall books.	*Encouraging thinking skills – "do you want to think about your plan"; foreshadowing "are you ready to make your plan"? Asking open-ended questions "what's your plan today"; Active listening/listening attentively; clarifying and repeating plan, affirming "thank you"; "who are you going to play with, what friends"; encouraging specific and detailed planning "are you going to play with it on the table or on the floor", "show me the friends you'll play will today", checking that other's heard the plan; enabling collaborative behaviour/encouraging friendships – remembering children who worked together the day before; responding to children's initiatives; asking children to think about" who's missing today", explaining Megan's absence "she's in the hospital today",*
07:31	06:41	*There was a sequence when James (?) asked the adult what her plans were. She offered to get her book so they could take turns and record her plan, she got the book and the children took turns in writing in her book. Offering to mind the books because "we don't want to get milk and cornflakes over them".*	*Responding to child's initiative; modelling detailed planning; building on children's interests "I plan to turn on the music because Rory planned to listen to music", "then making fifi jigsaw with Kevin"; modelling sequencing "my next plan...", giving explanations "play with trains because they are only new in"; modelling good practice - planning to tidy up afterwards anything she plays with at clean up time", repeating her four plans and clarifying them "music, trains, fifi jigsaw and cleanup"; explanation; extending "you can always make a plan to take your books out and draw pictures on them".*
10:42 26:53	09:46 26: 02	*Adult stands up to distribute breakfast, for her table. She distributes drink, and bowls of cereal to those who want it. Children talk amongst themselves. Adult sits down after 2½ minutes. Tony and Rory leave and Luke joins the group to finish his breakfast. Lots of chat ensues. Kevin is interfering with Luke's space; adult encourages talking about it. She refers one child to another. "Ask her yourself" [whether Em had a toy box].*	*Checking in with children did they want cereal; responding to their requests; affirming – "you are welcome Emily, lovely manners"; listening to Tony and agreeing; affectionately stroking Emily's hair to get it out of her eyes; initiating conversation with Rory "did you have breakfast this morning Rory"? monitoring for safety; explaining; offering seconds; direction "bring it to tray"; following through on plans "what was your plan"? explaining; inviting child from neighbouring table to join them; drawing on children's conversations "who's Adam"? dialogue about toy boxes; encouraging children to listen to each other; providing language*

Observation log – Birch; Day 4; Date:14/05/2009; Part of routine: Recall + SGT; Title: 'Decorating ducks' + ;Time:11.40-12.00; Length:20:27; Ratio 2: 4

Recorder Position		Description of activity Words in italics are not featured in descriptive vignette of group experiences	Researcher comment/first analysis
Film	Audio		
		Adult at the table in the table top area and press where meals are distributed. Two children are at the table (Noel and Ben). She introduces the Small Group Time activity. *Second adult has gone to return Emily to the table. She says "do you know what Emily said – it's recall time"!* *Adult acknowledges mistake. She suggests getting the books and minding the distributed ducks for a minute. She retrieves the ducks and gets the books.*	*Foreshadowing/ introducing activity - "do you know what we are going to make"? "We're going to make ducks"? "Remember our song – five little ducks went swimming"? "And we are going to decorate them and put them up on the wall"; she distributes the materials "one for Ben";* *Authentically declared a mistake in the routine "what did I forget to do? Repeat "what did I forget to do"? "Recall time"!*
02:28	02:59	*Recall time starts with Ben. The second adult chases Emily who gets continuously off her chair. The children at recall (clockwise from adult on film) are Emily, Luke, Noel & Ben; adult settles into recall time, she tries to hold Emily to prevent her from leaving again. When Emily makes another go, adult lets her. Noel recalls first, then Ben, then Luke and finally Emily, who is sitting on the second adult's knee. Adult records children's responses in their individual book.*	*Asking open-ended questions- "what did you do today"?; noise reduction strategy/enabling collaborative behaviour "I don't like that shouting, it hurts my ears"; referring to children's previous plans "Ben you said you wanted to...where did you play today? Referring to Noel's plan "you said you don't want to" (not clarified), but what did you play with today"? leaning forward and listening very attentively [a lot of background noise]; reminding children of materials they used earlier what colour pens did you have, remember, you had two pens" adult hold two fingers in the air, waits for a response. Luke says I had four pens, adult "four pens"? And says "you came over to me and said I have a red pen and a green pen"; Luke smiling, adult smiling, both looked like they were enjoying the interchange. Affirming children "thank you"; open-ended questioning "Emily, what did you play with today"?*
06:11	06:44	Small Group Time, making ducks. Adult retrieves the pre-cut ducks from a shelf behind her. She then distributes pots of glue and pasting sticks.	Introducing/foreshadowing "we're going to decorate our ducks"; distributing ducks "this one says Noel, this one says..."; encouraging thinking skills "what friend are we missing"?; "for you Ben, for you .... [Distributing pasting pots], giving directions "can you mix it

		Adult then produced a bowl of feathers and 'googly eyes' and tiny plastic shapes). Second adult models making a duck of her own, adult doesn't)	around to see what colour your glue is"?, following through "What colour is your glue"? Giving feedback "a lot is dropping, oh look at the dots"; Luke asks "can I have one of those [lifting a feather from a bowl stacked on top of other bowls of materials", adult says "yes, you can" in response and gives him the bowl. She writes an observation note on the incident; Luke she offers to help Luke with the feather, he accepts and she helps him. She then turns her attention to Ben, and gives feedback. Helps remove stickers from label and observes Luke and Ben [second adult working with Emily and Noel]
09:50	10:22	Discussion about 'Dinosaur egg'. Noel identifies a "dinosaur egg" in his bowl. The other children look at Noel, adult picks up the theme.	Directs children's attention to the contents of their bowl "there's some in here look", she broadens it out to other material in the bowl, "there are eggs and do you know what else is in here..."
10:43	11:16	Discussion about looking for eyes in the bowl and needing glue for the eyes. Noel announces he's finished and leaves the table. Brief discussion between practitioners. Second adult goes to get Noel and tells him about the second part of small group time. Ben leaves. Adult remains at table with Luke and Emily who are still working with the paste. Ben and Noel return with tall spray cans. Adults tidy up, Emily lingers at the table. Adult asks does she want more feathers.	Mock horror (hands over mouth, eyes wide, saying "ohhhh") when Ben looks for eyes"; affirmation "cool Ben", refocusing "and look Ben"; identification "butterflies"; naming/feedback "it's stuck to your fingers"; adult asks "what's that"? Checks in the children are they finished; affirming children "thank you"; directing children to leave their ducks to dry please; asking specific questions "where's your feathers gone"? Exploring the feel of feathers, accepting Emily's withdrawal from the touch of the feather. Responding to Noel's query "Where's mine"?
15:43	16: 15	Second adult begins to spray shaving foam onto Noel's place at the table. There are still items from the previous activity there [3 paste pots and feathers]. Adult settles Ben at the table, and removes items. The second adult pours shaving foam liberally onto the table. Emily joins the children. Each child got a small mountain of foam, which they thoroughly explored. The adult asked questions. Adult directs the children to look at me and show mw their faces. Naturally they turned around. Eventually all the children arrived at educator's table, group time	Asking open-ended questions, "what does that look like", "what does it feel like", enthusiastically receiving foam "yes please"!, extending "did you smell it"?; referring to children's own experiences "it smells like the gel that was in your hair"; physically supporting/caring – "let me roll up your sleeves"; extending "can you squash it in your hands"; modelling – covering her own hands with foam; extending "hold my hand" smiling to Emily, who does so with each hand, then to Ben; feedback "it's all you're your face"; extending "try squashing it Emily"; commenting "you look like Santa Claus with his great white beard"; Focussing -"Oh..., look..."; explaining – "it doesn't taste nice"; responding to children's questions "what's that", "this is shaving foam"; direction "show Geraldine" - I am clearly impacting on

		is over and dinner arrives. Brief adult: adult exchange with third adult. Other children from the second group arrived at the adult's table (Tony and Kevin). They returned to their own table for foam. Second adult took photos of the children. It was suggested it was time to wash hands for dinner and the children naturally left.	interactions"!; modelling children's actions (letting foam drop like Emily's, extending "catch"; extending vocabulary "very soft"; making suggestions " did you see yourself in the mirror, Noel"? Oh my God, look, repeat, enthusiasm & affection; "mix, mix"; describing - "Look, you've made spikes"; extending - "Clap your hands with it"
		Adult at the table in the table top area and press where meals are distributed. Two children are at the table (Noel and Ben). She introduces the Small Group Time activity. *Second adult has gone to return Emily to the table. She says "do you know what Emily said – it's recall time"!* *Adult acknowledges mistake. She suggests getting the books and minding the distributed ducks for a minute. She retrieves the ducks and gets the books.*	*Foreshadowing/ introducing activity - "do you know what we are going to make"? "We're going to make ducks"? "Remember our song – five little ducks went swimming"? "And we are going to decorate them and put them up on the wall"; she distributes the materials "one for Ben";* *Authentically declared a mistake in the routine "what did I forget to do? Repeat "what did I forget to do"? "Recall time"!*

Appendix 15 Learning Experiences' Vignettes

The following vignettes outline scheduled experiences in each of the three settings with two practitioners' consistent key group of children and the third practitioners' group of same aged children. The vignettes are recorded in order of the day of data gathering. Each vignette contains the day, the setting, the date, the title, the time using the 24 hour clock, the location within the setting, the number of adults and children (their gender) participating in the activity, the length of the activity, a brief description of the focus of the activity and the materials used. The beginning, the middle and the end of the activity are outlined as are any defining or unusual features of that day. Finally the vignettes sketch brief content of the interactions.

Vignette 1 Day 1 Cherry - 21/04/2009- 'Understanding words with Bob'- Time: 13.45 – 14.18
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 41 minutes and 42 seconds beginning at 13.40am. The scheduled activity occurred in the dedicated room of the setting. There was the full complement of eight key work children (four girls and four boys) with the practitioner in the room. There were no other groups of children present in this room. The main focus of this vignette was the understanding and using prepositions such as "in", "on", "under", and so on. The activity was conducted with all participants sitting around a circular table; it was based on three components and lasted 33 minutes. The components could be described as: 1) understanding the words, 2) identifying objects, 3) practice in using the words. This involved a card game using a series of 'picture cards', which depicted people and animals sitting on a chair, on a mat, under the table and so on. All the participants gathered around the table and the adult produced a box of cards from the floor. She held each card up for all children to see and asked, for example, "Does anybody know where this girl is standing? Children responded initially at random and then took turns. The next sequence involved the adult producing (also from the floor) an attractive shimmery blue box with a lid on it that one child wondered "Was it magic"? The adult opened the box and brought out its contents that the children then identified. Items included: a key, a ball, a plastic knife and spoon, a hair bobbin and a small velvet bag. Then the adult introduced Bob to the children. Bob is a finger puppet in the form of a large ring with large and protruding eyes. Bob gave directions to the children to follow based on the words used earlier. For example "Could you please put the bobbin in the bag and the bag in the box"? Bob also gave some directions to the children that they found amusing for example "Sit on your bums for a wee minute". Bob was finally used by each of the children to question each other. The adult remained in the one position. The activity naturally ended when a child suggested getting another piece of equipment.

Vignette 2 Day 1 Rowan - 22/04/2009 - 'Exploring sand and water'- Time: 11.12 – 11.37
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 46 minutes and 58 seconds beginning at 10.50am. The activity occurred at the permanent home table of this key working group, located in the book corner within a larger group room where two other similar sized groups were similarly engaged in small group experiences. There was the full complement of five key work children (two girls, three boys) and one practitioner involved

in the activity. The focus of this vignette was for the children to explore sand and water. The activity was conducted with all participants sitting around a small circular table and lasted 25 minutes. The activity could be divided into two parts 1) preparation and 2) exploration. The children cleared the table of dishes from their break, got help from the adult putting on aprons, and settled back to the table. The adult then got a PVC tablecloth and asked the children to help her put it over the table. The adult went to a different location in the room and collected small rectangular plastic boxes about the size of a sandwich box with some sand in them which she gave to each child. She also got five beakers and filled them with water, and returned to distribute the beakers to each child. She retrieved some pasting sticks, and some spoons and forks. Children poured water into the box, rolled the contents around, stirred the sand, added more water, poured excess water back into cup and repeated the cycle. Generally children were very engaged in the activity. Discussion was focussed on the sand. The adult retrieved materials on many occasions; she also moved around the table physically, squatted down to children's level and explored materials with the children. The adult asked "Does it make it like muck"? One boy did not want to participate in the activity; instead he got paper, pencil and scissors and quietly sat at the table, drawing and then cutting very precise shapes. The adult anticipated water threatening his work and responded quickly, fetching a cloth, and mopped up the water. Children gradually left the table until two remained pouring and stirring. They left when instructed to bring the sand boxes to the sink for circle time.

Vignette 3 Day 1 Birch - 23/04/2009- 'Making necklaces and bracelets'- Time: 11.25 – 12.03
This vignette is contained within a full filmed sequence of 39 minutes and 21 seconds beginning at 11.25am. The activity was located at a large circular table comprised of two semi-circular tables located in the art area within the larger permanent group room. There was one practitioner and six children (two girls and four boys) at the table initially. A second group with two adults and six children were similarly engaged in small group experiences in the room. Towards the end of the activity the original children gradually left and three new children (two girls and one boy) arrived. The main focus of this activity was threading beads and lasted for 39 minutes and 21 seconds and was divided into three components: 1) choosing and naming string colour 2) distributing bowls and tying knots in string 3) making necklaces. The children all gathered around the table. The adult produced some coloured string from a shelf behind her and asked each child and asked what colour string they wanted. Some comparisons on the choices were made. The adult said "You have the same colour, because you both have red". She then gave each child a prepared bowl (also located on the shelf behind her) with some beads in it. She gave herself the same materials. She then tied a knot on everyone's string to keep the beads from falling off. The activity progressed with children threading beads onto the string. One child finished hers within 14 minutes and others went on to make a second necklace. The adult remained in the same place for the duration of the vignette. Each child approached the adult to fasten the necklaces and putting them on, before leaving the table. Others spent much longer and made two necklaces. Strong feelings of frustration were expressed by two children during the activity requiring intervention by the adult in one instance and another practitioner in a second. In general the discussion was about "jewels" (beads), the

activity and one child sang a song. Children left the table and new children arrived. All but one child (nine in total) made at least one necklace. Finally one child was left threading (with the adult); dinner was brought in and she finished up quickly.

Vignette 4 Day 2 Cherry-28/04/2009- 'Making monsters' – Time: 11.15 – 11.58
This vignette is contained within a full filmed sequence of 1 hour, 11 minutes and 17 seconds beginning at 10.47am. The scheduled activity occurred in the dedicated room of the setting. There was the full complement of the eight key work children (four girls and four boys) with the practitioner in the room. There were no other groups of children present in this room. The main focus of this vignette was 'making monsters' out of materials. The activity was conducted with all participants sitting around a circular table and rectangular table placed side by side and covered in black plastic. The activity was comprised of three components and lasted 43 minutes and 4 seconds. The components could be described as: 1) preparing the environment and getting ready, 2) "let's see what we have"; foreshadowing the materials 3) making monsters; exploration of the materials. The activity began by the adult alerting the children to the plan while still in circle time, moving tables which were covered with black plastic, directing children to bring their chairs to the table and help each other to put on aprons. The adult called a second practitioner to bring her in materials which were already prepared on a tray. The adult asked children to distribute large plastic bottles and brought the tray to the table. She held up each item and asked children to identify it. The materials consisted of string, glitter, "woolly stuff" (cotton wool balls), lentils, couscous, coconut (which children smelled to try and identify), feathers, sticks, "googly eyes" and glue pens. The children went about making their monsters. The focus of discussion generally was on the materials and what kinds of monsters were going to be made. Discussion on what children need to say to each other to share materials occurred frequently. For example, the adult asked "If you need something, what do you say"? Children used the materials in a diversity of ways. The adult moved around and sat beside each child talking with them about what they were doing. One girl did not want to engage in the activity and was given a choice of "The books or the art". She chose books and looked at many throughout the morning; although she regretted her choice later. The activity ended naturally as children's interest waned and it was heading towards lunchtime.

Vignette 5 Day 2 Rowan-29/04/2009- 'Washing the animals'– Time: 11.24 – 11.47
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 58 minutes and 48 seconds beginning at 10.49am. The activity occurred at the water table, located in the art area within a larger group room where two other similar sized groups were also engaged in small group experiences. There was the full complement of five key work children (two girls, three boys) and one practitioner present. The focus of this vignette was for the children to wash the toy animals. The activity was conducted with the participants standing or sitting around the water tray and lasted 23 minutes. The activity could be divided into two parts: 1) the lead in; children finishing break and arriving at water table, and 2) washing the animals. It was one child's birthday that morning and three of the children choose to stay at the table and eat their ice-cream cake slowly, while the adult and two

boys went to the water table. The materials consisted of the water table, aprons, filled with warm sudsy water, farm, zoo animals and dinosaurs, enough Jey Cloths for each child, and a basin to put the cleaned animals into. The original two boys were very focussed on the task for 17 minutes, washing animals, putting them into basin, putting the cleaned animals back into the water and repeating the cycle. The adult was required to call the others frequently. The girls arrived separately, washed animals briefly and left. The final boy of the group eventually came over but did not want to wash the animals despite the adult's suggestion "Do you want to dry them"? He, with one of the girls, took the cover off the adjacent sand box and played with the sand. Some distractions occurred with other children's behaviour in the room, the need for children to use the toilet, and requesting remaining children to join the group. The focus of interactions was on the washing of the animals. The adult said "Oh get in and clean between his toes and behind his ears". Later when a child wanted to put his animal in the clean basin "is his tail washed and his toes"? Children found other animals in the room to wash and the adult named them as they splashed into the water "Oh a gorilla". The adult took the basin of cleaned animals away and the activity ended.

Vignette 6 Day 2 Birch-30/04/2009- 'Making/playing with play-dough'– Time: 11.27 – 11.56
This vignette is contained within a full filmed sequence of 36 minutes and 8 seconds beginning at 11.15am. The activity was conducted at a large circular table comprised of one semi-circular table and one rectangular table located in the art area within the larger permanent group room. There was one practitioner and five children (two girls and three boys). A second group with two adults and six children were similarly engaged in small group experiences in the room. This is the same group as in Vignette 3 of same age children. The main focus of this activity was making and playing with play-dough and lasted for 29 minutes. The activity could be described in three components: 1) lead in; preparing the materials 2) making play-dough, 3) playing with the play-dough. The materials comprised of a tub of flour, water, food colouring, basin and large wooden spoon. The adult got place mats and materials in a press nearby and asked the children to distribute the mats. The adult directed the children to take one spoonful of flour and add it to the basin. She asked "What else do we need to make play-dough"? "Water" was the response. Children took turns spooning flour and stirring in coloured water. When the play-dough was made, the adult distributed a piece to everyone and child got rollers , cutters and later scissors. The children spent the next 20 minutes playing with the play-dough. Interactions included discussions on pizza and children's favourite pizzas, the texture of the play-dough for example "smooth". Children made "macaroni", "cookies", "trains", "a picnic", "faces", "my ma", and other family members out of the play-dough. There were some brief interruptions from other children outside of the immediate group. The discussions which occurred were based on what the children were making. Children naturally finished their play and moved off to get ready for dinner.

Vignette 7 Day 3 Cherry-05.05.09- "Occupations & hide & seek" Time: 13.53 –14.10
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 30 minutes and 42 seconds beginning at 1.40am. The scheduled activity occurred in the dedicated room of the setting.

There was the full complement of eight key work children (four girls and four boys) with the practitioner in the room. There were no other groups of children present. The main focus of this vignette was to identifying people's occupations and play hide and seek with matching cards. The activity was conducted with all participants sitting around a large circular table and later moving around the room; it was based on three components and lasted 17 minutes. The materials included a set of pairs of playing cards of people depicted in working clothes (firemen, priest, builder, baker, mechanic, fisherman, dentist, doctor, footballer, tennis player, astronaut, nurse, and postman) and blue tack. The components could be described as: 1) "Does anyone know who this is"? 2) children choosing an occupation card, and 3) hide and seek. The adult held up one of a pair of cards and asked the children to identify who was in the picture. When all the occupations had been identified the adult asked them to "Pick a card, anyone you like" and then a game of hide and seek ensued. One child at a time hid an occupation card within the room on the wall with blue tack. In the meantime the adult shielded a second child's eyes (the child who had the matching occupation card) and sang songs while waiting. Subsequently, different children were chosen and its match was hidden on the wall. The main interactions were about experiences children had had with people representing the various occupations and that men and women can do all jobs. Then "where could the card be"? One child found the card quickly and there was speculation as to how that happened. The adult stayed seated, and the children came to her to have their eyes shielded. One child didn't want to hide her card; that was accepted by the adult "You don't want to? That's ok". The adult gave her the pair to hold. The game ended when every child who wanted to had a turn and the adult collected all the cards.

Vignette 8 Day 3 Rowan-06/05/2009-'Hammering play-dough'– Time: 11.18-11.46
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 54 minutes and 16 seconds beginning at 10.53am. The activity occurred at the permanent home table of this key working group, located in the book corner within a larger group room where two other similar sized groups were also engaged in small group experiences. There was the full complement of five key work children (two girls, three boys) and one practitioner involved in the activity. The focus of this vignette was for the children to work with play-dough using various implements. The activity was conducted with all participants sitting around a small circular table and lasted 28 minutes. The activity could be divided into three parts: 1) distributing materials, 2) hammering play-dough, and 3) using play-dough rollers and cutters. The materials initially included: play-dough, panel pin hammers, golf tees and circular lids. Later rollers and cutters were added. Two children (a boy and a girl) had finished their break and were sitting at the table, while the three others were finishing theirs. The adult produced play-dough, golf tees and panel hammers for each of them from behind her chair. Gradually the others finished their breaks and were give the materials. The children used their materials in a variety of ways. One boy started hammering the play-dough immediately. One girl carefully put all her tees into the play-dough by hand and then hammered them in. Another girl expertly hammered each tee into the play-dough, until there wasn't any space left on the play-dough. The interactions were about the materials; safe and proper use of the hammers. The adult said "You have to be very

careful, hit it low, low and on your play-dough"; "You do it gently"; "Look we can have different sized circles". There were distractions from other tables, a child left, and there were adult to adult discussions. However, the children looked to see what was happening, but promptly returned their attention to their own work. Children lost interest in the hammers and the adult got rolling pins and cutters. The children played rolling and using a variety of shapes to make patterns in their play-dough. Children worked at that for 15 minutes and then gradually left one by one. The boy who was last to finish his break was last to finish the play-dough. And the activity ended.

Vignette 9 Day 3 Birch - 08/05/2009 – 'Making people'– Time: 11.37-11.56
This vignette is contained within a full filmed sequence of 29 minutes and 41 seconds beginning at 11.30am. The activity was located at a rectangular table (seats 6) located in the table top area within the larger permanent group room. There were two practitioners and five children (two girls and three boys) at the table. A second group with one adult and six children were similarly engaged in small group experiences in the room. The main focus of this activity was making people and lasted for 19 minutes. The materials included paper doilies, pots of pink paste, pasting sticks, bowls of 'googly eyes', coloured sticks, feathers, hair and miscellaneous materials like tiny bunnies, and eggs. The sequence was divided into three components: 1) gathering the children to the table, 2) distributing materials, and 3) sticking and pasting. The children had been sitting at the table previously but had scattered. Both practitioners were involved in returning the children to the table to begin the activity. After 4 minutes everyone was settled and the adult asked each child who they were going to make and then gave them a doily. She slid the glue pot with pasting stick to those at the far end of the table. The second adult was also offered the materials. The children immediately started pasting the doily. Then each child was given the bowl with the materials in it. The adult said that there were "eyes, and sticks for their arms and sticks for their legs". The children stuck the materials onto the pasted page. Initially the adult encouraged the children not to put paste on their hands, but very quickly they did so. One girl covered her hands in paste and went around to all the children and adults at the table for them to hear the squishy sound when she squeezed her fingers. Some of the children had finished their people and went on to make hand prints on the doilies. The interactions were about the focus of the activity "What do you need"? "You've stuck your eyes down onto the page"; "Where are you putting the other eye"? The interactions were sometimes dominated by sining at the other table, and the hanging of 'people' to dry in a different location in the room. There was natural drift from the activity. The episode finally ended when a child got bitten by another child and the remaining two children at the table went to see what happened and the adult was required to prevent boys from kicking the door to the toilet.

Vignette 10 Day 4 Cherry - 12/05/2009- 'Exploring fish'– Time: 11.27 – 11.49
This vignette is contained within an audio sequence of 21 minutes and 53 seconds beginning at 11.27am and a filmed sequence of 14 minutes and 02 seconds beginning at 11.34. It began in the dedicated room and was conducted outside. There were six key work children (four girls and two boys) with the practitioner. There were no other groups of

children present. The main focus of this vignette was exploring fish. It was based on two components and lasted 22 minutes. The components could be described as: 1) putting on our aprons and talking about what's going to happen and going outside and 2) discovering about the physical properties of fish. The materials consisted of disposable plastic butchers apron's; three fresh sea bream (fish) contained in a basin of water. The adult helped children put on their comprehensive aprons and talked about how they were going to explore fish outside and how they would walk through the green room and try not to disturb the children there. They went outside and settled around a large circular table prepared with a black plastic cover. The adult rinsed the fish while outside and brought the basin with the fish over to the table. She took the fish out and laid them on the table. The adult spoke about the fish referring to the story she had read earlier that morning. She suggested that the children share one fish between two and explore them. Some were reluctant to touch the fish initially; one in particular only touched it with her fingertips. All of the others did explore them. One boy described them as "slimy". The interactions were entirely focussed on the fish and their properties. The children checked for teeth, fish's wings, and felt the fish's scales. One boy made the fish 'fly', by holding the fish by its wings in both hands directing it through the air. There was laughter. The children smelt the fish, put the fish in the basin and took them back out again. The adult encouraged them to notice anything they could about the fish and moved around from child to child (including the girl who was not interested in touching the fish). One girl wanted to see "his brain" and then "his blood". A second practitioner came out and took photos. The session drew to a close when one boy said "I'm freezing". Children took their aprons off and went inside.

Vignette 11 Day 4 Rowan-13/05/2009-'Making play-dough'– Time: 11.22 – 11.49
This vignette is contained within a filmed sequence of 43 minutes and 19 seconds beginning at 11.06am. The activity occurred at the permanent home table of this key working group, located in the book corner within a larger group room where two other similar sized groups were also engaged in small group experiences. There were four key work children (two girls, two boys) and one practitioner involved in the activity. The focus of this vignette was for the children to make play-dough, individually from scratch. The activity was conducted with all the participants sitting around a small circular table and lasted 27 minutes. The material consisted of flour, water, food colouring, pasting sticks, coloured bowls for mixing. The activity could be divided into three parts: 1) organising materials, 2) making play-dough, and attracting others, and 3) playing with the play-dough. Children were having break, some finished earlier than others. The adult had got the children's aprons and left them behind their chairs and had told them earlier that they would be making play-dough for their activity that day. The adult organised the materials and distributed the bowls giving choice of colour. One boy (the same boy who has never engaged in the experiences at hand) did not want to make play-dough. Other children (four boys) come over and are very interested in what this key group are doing. They are eventually persuaded to leave. The three children make their play-dough. The interactions are about the ingredients, where they came from, the colours and the importance of mixing. The children are advised to add more water or flour as their play-dough becomes thick or sloppy. They are also asked to leave some ingredients for others to use. One boy continues

to eat his break slowly. He brings his mat and beaker and plate away and the adult offers to get him made play-dough as he doesn't want to make it. He works away with the play-dough, a rolling pin and a "big circle" he found. The episode ended when the children who'd made the play-dough were finished and the adult cleaned the table. The one boy was still there working away.

Vignette 12 Day 4 Birch-14/05/2009- 'Decorating ducks' and 'Exploring shaving foam'– Time:11.40-12.00

This vignette is contained within a full filmed sequence of 26 minutes and 42 seconds beginning at 11.34am. The activity was located at a rectangular table (seats 6) located in the table top area within the larger permanent group room. There were two practitioners and four children (one girl and three boys) at the table. A second group with one adult and six children were similarly engaged in small group experiences in the room. There were two distinct experiences in this episode the first was decorating pre-cut ducks and the second was exploring shaving foam. Both lasted 20 minutes and 27 seconds in total. The materials included the pre-cut yellow duck shape, pots of paste, pasting sticks, bowls of 'googly eyes', feathers, miscellaneous materials like tiny bunnies, and eggs and shaving foam. This sequence was divided into three components: 1) distributing materials, 3) sticking and pasting and 3) exploring shaving foam. The adult had distributed some of the ducks earlier, reminding the children of the song 'five little ducks' and that they were going to decorate the ducks and put them on the wall. However, she realised she had forgotten to do recall with the children. She explained she had forgotten, retrieved the ducks and did recall. When recall was over the adult then redistributed the prepared ducks with the children's names written on them. She slid the glue pot with pasting stick to those at the far end of the table; and the children started pasting their ducks. The adult then produced bowls of materials for each child from the shelf behind her. The second practitioner modelled making a duck of her own. The interactions were focussed on the task at hand. The materials were discussed, the feathers, needing glue for the eyes. One boy offered that he had "a dinosaur egg". The talk at the other table dominated and sometimes could be heard more clearly on both the film and audio record. At 11.50 one child left the activity, the second practitioner went after him and both arrived back to ask the adult would they bring the other part of small group time. They arrived back with shaving foam. The adult asked "What's that"? She checked with the children were they finished with their ducks. The ducks were left to dry and most of the materials on the table were tidied away. The second practitioner helped one child to spray the shaving foam onto the table. Each child got a small mountain of foam, which they thoroughly explored. The adult asked questions "What does it feel like"? She described "Look, you've made spikes" and made suggestions "Clap your hands with it". All the children from the second group arrived at the adult's table and explored. It was suggested it was time to wash hands for dinner and the children naturally left

Appendix 16 Transcription Notation System

Wells (1985a) transcription notation system was adopted, as it is the most suitable scheme to convey conversation in naturalistic settings. The following is an example of the system.

Square brackets:	[contextual clues]
---	prompting pause
..	pause (2 dots)
...	silence/incomplete response (3 dots)
Italics:	Emphasis
Underlined:	<u>overlap between speakers</u>
***	unintelligible speech
Italics in square brackets:	[non verbal signals e.g. *gestures, nods, shakes head*]

Appendix 17 Refined Coding

Refinement of codes after applying to one scheduled group activity using Excel (14.07.09)

Broad categories	Early childhood interaction coding schedule	New/extending codes
Mainly Social	Expressing concern (physical care, attendance to bumps, affection/cuddles)	Demonstrating concern
	Social conversation (talking about topics not focussed on activity, uncritical sharing)	Social conversation
	Encouraging (affirming, feedback)	Affirming/facial expression/high five/humour/ repeating/encouraging
		Redirecting
	Reprimanding (statements intended to change behaviour from non-acceptable to acceptable patterns)	Enabling collaborative behaviour (to denote interactions to encourage listening to each other)
Mainly cognitive	Direction (informing, describing, explaining, directing, initiating an activity, organising and allocating tasks)	Making statement, directing (to do), explaining, describing, offering choice, making a suggestion
	Extending/scaffolding	Extending/scaffolding
	Modelling (demonstrating)	Modelling (demonstrating)
	In discussion (actively listening, sharing of conversational control)	Questioning - closed-ended questions, apparently open-ended questions and open-ended questions
	Responds to child initiation	Responds to child initiation
	No interaction	No interaction
	Other	Other
		Using humour Using novelty Attention getting strategy/ Creating anticipation/ forewarning/producing materials/prompting Relating content to children's home Noise reduction Non verbal request Novelty
Both		

Appendix 18 Excel Codes - Framework for Analysis

T E X T	Pedagogy	Social	Cognitive	Episodes	Challenge	Responsive	Other	
	Both Mainly social Mainly cognitive No interaction	Concern/help/ care/toilet/ cuddle/ Acknowledging feelings/Ack/ Feel Social chat/soc Affirm/encourage / Repeat/feedback Redirect/ Manage Supporting peer relations / SPR Ensuring turn-taking// ETT Supporting manners/ SM	Instruct Statement/ Instruct/S Instruct To do Instruct/TD Instruct Explain Instruct/E Instruct Describe Instruct/D Instruct offering choice/ Instruct/C Instruct Suggest/ Instruct/Su Scaffold/extend *Model Mod/L/ Mod/S Mod/B Discuss/Questioning (see below)	Initiation, Response, Feedback/ Follow up Sustained Dialogues Child initiated Or Adult initiated	Degree of cognitive challenge High : Problem-solving, comparing, predicting, evaluating Medium – Med describing, recalling, prompt, elaboration Low - Low Concrete, label, yes/no, locate No reflection/ evaluation - NE High Potential No Follow Through/PNFT No time/NT Practitioner responds Missed opportunities – MO	ResponsivenesS ensitivity (Stremmel, 1993; Smith, 1999) Res/Sens Non responsiveness Non/Res	Adult leaves Adult: Adult Sign language Humour High Expectations Creating anticipation Children wait Contradiction Gesture/Indicate Gesture/Congrats Gesture/Stop Expressiveness Expletive Relating content to children's home Noise reduction Non verbal request Novelty Shifts direction in conversation Mock Horror/ Mock excitement Produce materials Distribute materials	Adult lvs Adult: Adt SL Hum High Ex Cre/Ant Ch'n wait Contradiction Ges/Ind Ges/Con Ges/Stp Exp Expletive RCCHL Noise/R NVR Novelty SD Mock Hor Mock Exc Prod/Mat Dist/Mat

Question type ~	Example	Code
Open-ended question	How did you know? /Can you think of any?	Quest/OE
Apparently open-ended question	If no response from the child	Quest/AOE
Open-ended question: tag/contributions	Do you have any strawberries to put on my cereal?	Quest/Tag
Open-ended question: pseudo wonder	I wonder why the play-dough is so sloppy?	Quest/PW
Closed question : with one known	Where is the girl in the picture?	Quest/1K
Closed question: answer not known	Where are the golf clubs kept?	Quest/UK
Closed question: yes/no	Have you been to the park?	Quest/YN
Closed question: elicit recall	Do you remember ... ?	Quest/ER
Closed question: pseudo choice/indirect request	Can you put your aprons on?	Quest/PS
	You'll have to wait your turn, ok?	Quest /R
Closed question: about rules	The dolly is going *in* the buggy, isn't she?	Quest/S
Closed question: statement questions	They all went into the ---	Quest/P
Closed question: prompt	Aren't I such a silly billy?	Quest/Rh
Closed question: rhetorical		

*Adapted from Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004) Modelling appropriate: language, behaviour and skills. ~ Adapted from Siraj-Blatchford & Manni (2008)

Appendix 19 Aide Memoire - Broad Analysis of Experiences

	Setting 1 Cherry	Setting 2 Rowan	Setting 3 Birch
	Title: Understanding words & Bob	**Title:** 'Sand & water'	**Title:** 'Making necklaces'
Day 1	**Features** 33 minutes Thought through Materials appropriate/ organised in advance All 8 children engaged Extensive vocabulary Practitioner remained stationary Adult directed	**Features** 25 minutes Motivating Materials appropriate/not organised in advance 4 out of 5 children engaged Limited vocabulary Practitioner continually left, and physically moved from child to child Open-ended	**Features** 38 minutes Restricted Materials appropriate/ organised in advance 4 out of 6 children moderately engaged (2 tantrums) Limited vocabulary Practitioner remained stationary Product oriented
Day 2	**Title:** Making monsters	**Title:** Washing the animals	**Title:** Making play-dough
	Features 43 minutes Thought through Materials meaningless /organised in advance 7 out of 8 engaged Extensive vocabulary Practitioner physically moved from child to child Open-ended	**Features** 23 minutes Limited Materials appropriate/ organised with child at the beginning of the activity 2 out of 5 engaged Limited vocabulary Located at water table where Practitioner continually left, and physically moving and from child to child Adult directed	**Features** 29 minutes Thought through Adult controlled in the actual making of the dough Engaging 5 out of 5 engaged Moderate vocabulary Materials appropriate/organised Practitioner remained stationary Adult made dough, then open-ended
Day 3	**Title:** Occupations & hide & seek	**Title:** Hammering play-dough	**Title:** Making people
	Features 17 minutes Thought through Materials appropriate/ organised in advance All 8 children engaged Extensive vocabulary Practitioner remained stationary; children moved Adult directed	**Features** 28 minutes Interesting Materials appropriate/ organised All 5 children engaged Moderate vocabulary Practitioner continually left Open-ended	**Features** 19 minutes Limited Materials meaningless/organised in advance 5 children moderately engaged Limited vocabulary Practitioner remained stationary Product oriented
Day 4	**Title:** Exploring fish	**Title:** Making play-dough	**Title:** Decorating ducks & shaving foam'
	Features 22 minutes Thought through Materials appropriate/ organised in advance All 6 children engaged (I engaged but avoided touching the fish) Only activity located outside. Extensive vocabulary Practitioner physically moved from child to child Open-ended	**Features** 27 minutes Appealing Limited vocabulary Materials appropriate/ gathered during activity 3 out of 4 engaged Limited vocabulary Practitioner continually left, and physically moved from child to child Open-ended (successful process, no product)	**Features** 20 minutes Ducks – Limited Foam – Interesting Ducks - Materials meaningless /organised in advance Ducks – 3 out of 4 engaged Product oriented Foam – logical/produced with child Foam – All 4 engaged Moderate vocabulary Practitioner remained stationary Ducks - product oriented Foam – open-ended

Appendix 20 Small Group Learning Experiences Daily Planning Sheet

Date: **Educator:** **Children:** **Time:**

Composition of group:
The rationale for the group formation, number and gender of group members

Aims/learning goals, themes:
What is the aim of the activity, what are the key learning goals to be achieved by the children? How does that link to Aistear?

Activity:
Describe the activity that will meet these aims and where it will take place.

Source of ideas/rationale:
What children's interest, literature, event or experience inspired my activity idea and why?

Resources:
What resources do I need to conduct the experiences?

Preparation:
What do I need to do in advance to ensure the activity runs smoothly? How do I prepare the children? How do I ensure the activity is cognitively challenging?

Key vocabulary:
What are the key words which I will use in this activity?

Interaction strategies:
What interaction strategies will I use (e.g. scaffolding, demonstration, modelling, directing, facilitating thinking, other...)? How can I engage the children in extended purposive conversation? How did the children respond to the strategies?

Process:

Beginning
Middle
End

Evaluation:
How did the activity go overall? What did children say about the activity? What did staff say? Were my learning goals met? What did the children learn? What did I learn? What would I do differently next time?

Extension/ Follow up experiences: *How can I capitalise on the children's learning and extend the activity? What will I plan for the future based on my observations and evaluation of the children's responses to the activity?*

Drawn from Hohmann et al., 2008 and the NCCA, 2009d

Appendix 21 Thematic Review of Conclusions and Implications

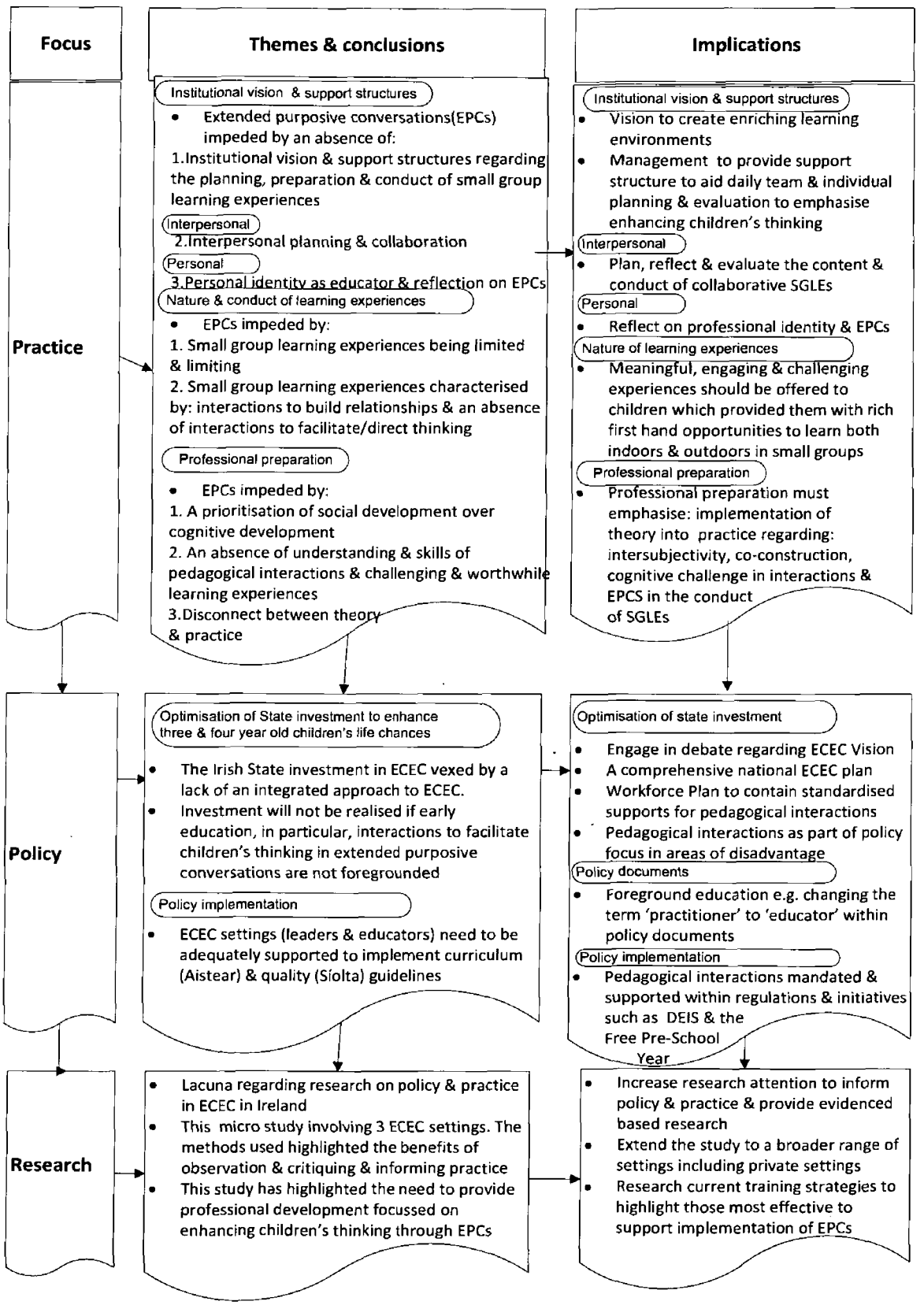

Figure 21 *Thematic review of conclusions and implications*